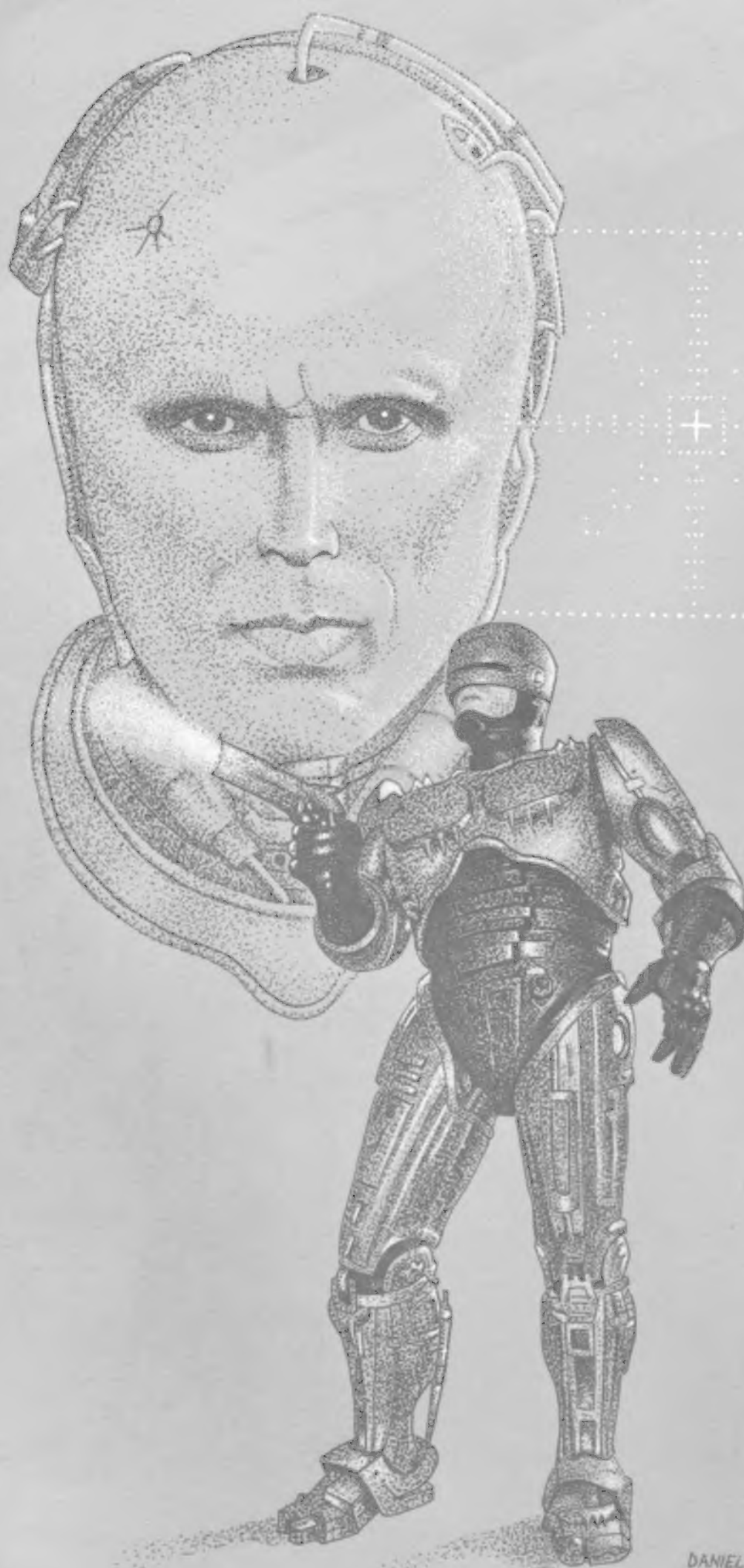


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DANIELS

# midnight marquee

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**FRONT COVER:** Every child's worst nightmare: Freddy Krueger armed with his razor-sharp metallic fingers ready for the kill from *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III: DREAM WARRIORS*, rendered by Allen Koszowski; **INSIDE FRONT:** Dave Daniels sensitively captures the mechanical humanity of *ROBOCOP*; **INSIDE BACK:** Lon Chaney's *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* is shown here both disguised and unmasked, stylistically created by Robert Knox; **BACK COVER:** Dave Robinson's stark capturing of Jack Nicholson's haunted insanity from Stanley Kubrick's *THE SHINING*.

**DEDICATION:** To all our readers and supporters during our first 24 years of publication. Thank you for allowing *Midnight Marquee* to prosper, to develop, and to grow.

Welcome to issue #36 of *Midnight Marquee*, beginning our 24th year of publication. Yes, next fall marks our 25th year of publication, and we plan to celebrate it in a very special way—but more about this "special edition" anniversary issue shortly!

After being "stiffed" by another distributor who ordered \$400 worth of issues and then filed for bankruptcy, things have been looking upward for all of us here at *MidMar*. After our initial attempt at sponsoring a large-scale film convention, *FANEX84*, crashed and burned due to over-enthusiasm, we are sponsoring a smaller scale version (aiming to attract 150 or so people) September 26 at the local Howard Johnson Motor Lodge. Noted writer Greg Mank is our scheduled guest of honor. However, if this small-scale convention is successful, we again will be sponsoring a larger version featuring *film celebrity* guests next year. We'll keep you posted!

Time for the good news! One of the real strongholds of the magazine/distribution business is FantaCo Enterprises, Inc., an outfit headed by Tom Skulan, a *MidMar* reader and fan for at least 15 years. FantaCo has been a full-time mail order business since 1978, and their ads appear regularly in every issue of *Fangoria*. FantaCo Publishing began in 1979 with the publication of their first comic strip rodent mascot, Smilin' Ed. From this point FantaCo published cartoon books, comic books, comic news magazines, and horror film titles such as Chas. Balun's *Horror Holocaust*. In September of 1988, FantaCo will be publishing a 208 page issue #37 (our 25th Anniversary issue) which will sport a full-cover Bill Nelson cover (with Allen Koszowski's total blessing) and will be bound as a trade paperback. We are ecstatic! However, we will still maintain our "amateur" fanzine status. True, FantaCo hopes to make some money. They will be paying for the printing costs, some of the production costs, and will handle distribution. We, on the other hand, will receive a specific number of copies free which will be distributed to contributors and to the studios, public relation agencies, etc. A select amount of copies will be available for us to sell to the general public—but more on this later.

In 1988, FantaCo will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary, and Tom plans to celebrate this milestone by hosting the largest *FANTACON* he has ever sponsored in Albany, New York. The film, media, comics, video, records, original art convention will be held September 10-11 at the Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Convention Center in Albany (the hall has 110,000 square feet) featuring separate film rooms. The big news is that our special anniversary issue will be premiered at this convention. And hopefully Sue and I will be attending participating in all the festivities. Therefore, it would be wonderful if as many *MidMar* readers and contributors could attend as possible.

*FANTACON* will only be six dollars per day at the door, but special ads in *Fangoria* later in the year will announce special rates. If you are a dealer, tables cost \$95 per table, and Tom claims the dealers' room will host as many as 200 tables. It is a bit early to announce celebrities attending, but Forrest J Ackerman and Chas. Balun have already committed. Tom tells me he is working on lining up major film/book celebrity talent as special guests. Besides the premiere of *Midnight Marquee* #37, *Core Shriek* in limited edition signed and numbered (with all the artists in attendance) will be

**EDITORIAL** [Continued on page 26]



Fiend Without a Face and First Man Into Space, respectively a legitimate monster movie classic and sci-fi curio of the 1950s, came about, literally, because producer Richard Gordon decided he'd rather do it himself.

Gordon came to New York City, from his native London, in 1949 to form Gordon Films Inc., an import-export firm and producers' representation agency. Within a few years he had set up a series of a dozen or so co-productions, arranging for American actors (including Richard Denning, Pat O'Brien, Zachary Scott, Rod Cameron and Wayne Morris) to travel to England to star in crime and action melodramas.

Deciding that he might as well be making his own films, Gordon formed Producers Associates, and with John Croydon (the associate producer of Dead of Night), set up a deal with MGM and negotiated for the services of Boris Karloff (a long-time friend) and studio contract player Marshall Thompson.

The two Producers Associates sci-fi movies, Fiend and First, still have a solid reputation nearly 30 years after they were made. Both are frequently seen on television and are available on videocassette. They were also "invited" to become part of the permanent film collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. Of Gordon's 14 sci-fi

or horror films, five (the MGM quartet and a recent remake of Cat and the Canary) have been so honored, an incredible tribute considering that genre films are usually not housed in museums.

For the record, besides the MGM films mentioned here, Gordon produced Devil Doll, Curse of the Voodoo (Curse of Simba in England), Island of Terror, The Projected Man, Naked Evil, Tales of the Bizarre (Secrets of Sex in England), Tower of Evil (aka Horror on Snape Island), Horror Hospital, Cat and the Canary, and Horror Planet (aka Inseminoid). His The Secret Man, also starring Thompson, is essentially a spy film with science fiction overtones. He is also sometimes credited for producing Playgirls and the Vampire, Tomb of Torture and Cave of the Living Dead which he only "presented" in America [Gordon oversaw the English-dubbed versions released in the States], and The Womanator, with which he had no production involvement at all. For his first two science fiction movies, Gordon improved on the concept that world box-office receipts could be bolstered by bringing American actors to Europe to star in films by giving the entire movie an invented U.S. setting.

Giving First Man Into Space and Fiend Without a Face an "American" look involved, besides hiring Thompson, supporting him with U.S., Canadian, or British actors who could successfully fake an accent.





Crowds of anxious movie-goers, at the Rialto Theater on Times Square, gather round **THE FIEND WITHOUT A FACE** traveling exhibit.

The ill-fated astronaut of First Man Into Space, Bill Edwards, was also an American. When casting failed to produce the desired results, voices of other actors were dubbed, or "looped," into the film. This also needed to be done in First so that the "voice" of the actor inside the monster-suit could be rendered audible.

Beyond the casting, and such obvious ploys as using imported cars or a sign indicating a U.S. city or military facility, care had to be taken in choosing locales. The wooded area outside London that doubled for the Canadian-American border in Fiend Without a Face looked right because, obviously, one woodland is about the same as the next. But the setting of First Man Into Space, Albuquerque, New Mexico, brought on a new set of problems.

To solve them, Gordon asked his brother Alex, then a charter producer at American International, to film establishing shots, such as cars traveling down a cactus-lined desert highway. Gordon also arranged for filming at an under-used Brooklyn Air Force base, which doubled for an Albuquerque site.

Despite his efforts, Gordon is not convinced that the films have a sufficiently American look. He points to a potpourri of accents, particularly in Fiend Without a Face, but theorizes that "since we are supposedly at the Canadian border, dialects could easily be mistaken for Canadian." In defense of the films, however, it is probably safe to say that the sci-fi and drive-in movie crowd both were geared for gave neither the accents or exteriors any particular mind. While, at best, there may be a very vague sense of unease, of something being not quite right, it is doubtful that very many viewers actually "caught on," either then or now.

An exception may be the film critics and residents of the Albuquerque area where MGM, in its wisdom, staged a premiere of First Man Into Space. Gordon had nothing at all to do with this particular creative decision, masterminded totally by the studio publicity and marketing department. Actually, it is common for distributors to stage openings in communities, outside Hollywood, where films are made, probably in part to drum up virtually guaranteed favorable press and capacity movie houses that can be hyped into bookings elsewhere. Gordon doubts that MGM ever consciously realized their mistake, probably caused by a publicist simply reading a plot synopsis and taking it from there. The result was that area residents were promised the chance of seeing a new movie where it was filmed, though it was filmed about 7,000 miles away. It was apparently one thing to give the movie an American look, but quite another to convince New Mexico residents, who did not respond well.

Gordon notes that, ideally, the solution would have been to send a second unit crew, and actors, to New Mexico for some scenes while the rest of the film would still have been made in England, but production schedules and budget (estimated at \$75,000) prevented this luxury.

Fiend Without a Face, or more exactly the short story "The Thought Monster" by Amelia Reynolds Long, came to Gordon via Forrest J



The monstrous "mental vampires" become visible during the climax of **FIEND WITHOUT A FACE**, yet their cables/wires remain invisible

Ackerman through Alex Gordon. Ackerman was representing various Weird Tales authors, getting their stories into the hands of film producers. Of the "weird tales" that crossed Gordon's desk, this one intrigued him the most, and he commissioned Herbert J. Leder to draft a screenplay.

Gordon recalls the original story as basically a horror piece in which a scientist creates invisible monsters through thought projection. To update the material, Leder brought in a military base background and the gimmick of atomic power giving strength and visibility to the creatures. Gordon suspects that Leder was also operating under a false assumption (one not encouraged by the producers) that he was going to direct. In fact, the task fell to Arthur Crabtree, who had earned a reputation at Rank. Crabtree's work on the film was so impressive, Gordon reports, that it led directly to Herman Cohen hiring him for Horrors of the Black Museum.

Fiend Without a Face achieves a level of ingenuity in its combining of sci-fi and horror themes alone. But it is also a unique and noteworthy film because it brings to the screen what genre historian Donald Willis has aptly termed "one of the most fascinating of the late 1950's myriad monsters."

Fiend is remembered generally for the creatures themselves, a highly original departure from the giant men, women, and insects that stalked us during the monster movie era. Though invisible for most of the film, they eventually appear as brains with an attached spinal cord, moving methodically until they leap through the air to quickly—and irrevocably—attach themselves to the necks of their victims, from whom they drain both brain and spine.

To achieve the needed result, Gordon and Croydon had to look beyond England for the right effects technicians. Gordon believed that because British filmmakers were not then specializing in sci-fi monsters, except for an occasional Crawling Eye or Giant Behemoth, that there were few craftsmen capable of giving birth to the monsters, planning various attacks, and orchestrating their final horrible destruction.

The producers contracted with Florenz Von Nordhoff, a Munich-based Daliesque artist and experimental filmmaker, who imagined the creatures forth, on a sketch pad, from a plot outline provided over a studio lunch table. He then returned to Germany to design the fiends while in London the live-action was in production. Von Nordhoff returned to London at the appropriate time, a box containing a nest of monsters under his arm.

It was, first of all, up to the actors to create the illusion of being attacked by holding the inanimate creatures around their necks and screaming away. These scenes would later be joined to animation, created by K. L. Ruppel, via blue backing and back projection. For one brief scene where the monsters land on the floor after flying through the window, however, it was necessary for crewmen to throw the fiends into camera-range.

Back in Munich, Ruppel went into his basement studio where he attached wires, hooked in turn to over-head motors, to the fiends.



Top: Even under close scrutiny, the model monsters, created by Munich-based artist Florenz Von Nordhoff, look horrific and terrifying; Bottom: One of the "fiends" attaches itself to the neck of a victim, from whom they drain both brain and spine.

Each wire and motor animated a single function, such as a raised sensory tentacle that served as the creature's eyes. These movements were timed to camera shutters with each movement placed on two frames of film. The laborious process was repeated again and again with the stop motion also serving to blur the wiring so completely that it became virtually invisible.

Pay attention to the scene in which a fiend dives at and latches itself onto the neck of heroine Kim Parker. Close observation reveals the screaming woman reacting to the oncoming creature then spinning as if struck, with a brain sucker on her neck. Actually, she is reacting to nothing. We never actually see the monster land on her, but we think we do. Virtually all the editing (by R. Q. McNaughton) and direction (Croydon also claims some directorial credit for this sequence) work. We never doubt that man and monster are within inches—or even closer—to each other.

Then came the destruction of the beings. The fiends outsmart themselves when they cause an over-load at the atomic plant. In becoming more powerful, they also become visible. This gives our heroes an advantage that they put to good use.

Effects crewmen stood ready, a fresh made pot of raspberry jam in hand. Since the film was shot in black and white, it was a suitable substitute for blood whenever a fiend is shot. Later, the monsters literally evaporate due to the shutdown of the power plant. This effect was achieved by placing wires through the floor and into the creatures, pulling them down, and imploding them. At the same point, liquids and jams shot up through the floor, making it appear that they were gushing forth their life force.

In a May 28, 1958 review, *Variety* critic Powe noted: "It (the film) oozes and gurgles with Grand Guignol blood and crunching bones...easily one of the goriest horror pictures in the current

cycle." The eventual destruction is "shown with closeups of the blood and brains pouring out of their skulls with accompanying sound effects...gore is the only thing that seems to satisfy audiences of this type of picture and there is plenty of it here."

Gordon, in retrospect, finds amusement in the response to the film, since he notes it would easily qualify for a "PG" rating if re-issued today. But *Fiend* was strong stuff, perhaps the strongest of stuff, in its time. The attacks and death scenes were considered horrific and edited down both for British, and to a lesser degree, American release. Despite the cuts, the film went out with an "X" rating in England, something that would never have happened today. It is interesting to note that Gordon varied the *Fiend* formula with silicates, beings that sap bone rather than brains, in his decade later *Island of Terror*, directed by Terence Fisher.

To recap *Fiend* briefly: a farmer is killed just outside the U.S. Air Force Command Experimental Station at Montoba, Canada. The locals blame radiation because the base is using atomic power to boost radar signals to and from planes spying on Siberia. As the deaths continue, the natives amend their theory to include the supposed presence of a maddened G.I. on the prowl.

The beliefs of the locals—a variation on the superstitious villagers of the Universal hey-day—are treated with equal contempt by the military and scientists, who consider them the result of underused minds. And it is also typical of sci-fi films of the period that the military heroes are the doers, the people who must save us all from the well intentioned but bungling intellectuals.

In *The World of Fantastic Films* by Peter Nicholls, the author notes *Fiend* is the ultimate in anti-intellectual films since "there can be few movies where the villains are carnivorous brains."

*Fiend* provides originality in making hero Thompson something of a diplomat and moderate, concerned equally with people and the success of his mission. His superiors are, in contrast, pure stereotype, steeped in militarism acting somewhat buffoonish, seeing reds under beds everywhere. When the atom boosted radar zeroes in on Siberia, one character declares gleefully: "We can watch those Russians right in their backyards." The screenplay also reflects the cold war era in that Thompson is trying to convince everyone else in the cast that the Air Force is just trying to protect U.S. and Canada from Soviet attack.

Leder and Crabtree do, however, demonstrate the disruptive and unwanted impact of the base, especially in a symbolic sense, when a low-flying jet plane interrupts prayers at the funeral service for a slain farmer.

And the buffoonish nature of Thompson's superiors is established to the obvious amusement of our hero when they mistake a farmer's jottings of take-offs and landings as evidence of espionage. Actually, the man was establishing a connection between the crafts' air routes and cows being frightened out of giving milk.

The developing romantic relationship between Thompson and Ms. Parker chagrins the woman's boyfriend and fists fly. None of this is particularly interesting because we know, even as the soon-to-be lovers are squabbling, that everything will work out for them. But the pacing picks up when the "mental vampires", as they are called, take center-screen. They're the quite literal brain-children of the well-meaning Professor Walgate (Kynaston Reeves) who wants to make man's life easier by using projected thought to perform manual labor.

Reeves uses electrical energy to stimulate his brain-waves and, with an unexpected boost from a lightning storm, succeeds. He then devises a plan for diverting a portion of the power from the base radar to further bolster his own mental powers. Unfortunately, he creates invisible thought monsters. This variation on the "Id" theme may have been brought to the screen just after MGM's *Forbidden Planet*, but Ms. Long's concept predates that film by about 20 years.

And Reeves, a renowned character actor, provided one of the most likable and vulnerable mad scientists of the movies. Frail to begin with, he is totally powerless and remorseful over what has happened. He must meet the standard fate preordained to those who tamper in God's domain: death at the hands of his own creations. But Crabtree and Leder at least allow this to happen under heroic circumstances.

The film's weaker moments involve a poorly acted and directed variation on the *Frankenstein* films, with the villagers arming themselves to hunt down the "mad G.I." But any flaws are more than made up for by the monsters, and a sequence in which they fly through a

window, en masse, at their potential victims is an audience grabber.

Nicholls refers to Fiend as the purest example of "surrealism in cinema" with "the bizarreness of some mad, medieval allegory" and a "particularly crazed example" of "the continuing vitality of the fantastic cinema."

None of this was apparently lost on a youthful Norman J. Warren, who was a teenager when he saw Fiend in a London movie-house. It was one of the films that inspired him to become a movie-maker. He and Gordon later met; they became friends and Warren eventually directed Horror Planet.

Warren recently directed Time Warp Terror (aka Bloody New Year) which included a tribute to Fiend in a sequence in which young people, caught in the '50s by a time-bending experiment gone awry, watch that film being projected in a movie house.

In an interview for MidMar Warren notes he selected Fiend because of its impact on him, similarities in the themes of the two films, and his friendship with Gordon; but mostly because it is a superior example of a sci-fi film youngsters would have indeed been watching in a cinema at that time.

The ongoing praise Fiend receives today flatters, and somewhat amuses, Gordon. "I have long since learned that when I'm at a social gathering, and someone asks the inevitable 'have you made anything that I might have seen,' I say Fiend Without a Face. People invariably tell me of the impact it had on them as a teenager or that it is a personal favorite or cult movie at their college or university," he reflects. This is because, Gordon believes, despite the profusion of more state of the art splatter movies today that, as Nicholls noted, the visions of crawling, flying, murderous brains still have few equals.

Fiend was filmed to be paired with another Gordon film, The Haunted Strangler (Grip of the Strangler in England). Neither escaped the scrutiny of censors. Gordon recalls that the pre-credit sequence, a public hanging, had to be cut somewhat overseas because "of the party atmosphere surrounding the event and the clear implication that some of those watching were being excited sexually. Of course, if I were making the film today, not only could the film be stronger, but there would be a lot more than implication," he notes.

Gordon also believes that there are two sets of values in censorship: one for major, the other for smaller films. He said the prison flogging sequence was also trimmed down in England yet recalls that, as a youth, he watched a scene in Mutiny on the Bounty (ironically, also an MGM film) in which Charles Laughton supervises the beating of an already dead sailor.

The success of Haunted Strangler and Fiend Without a Face was such that MGM quickly agreed to another sci-fi horror double-bill, preferably a Karloff-Thompson combination. Work was begun on Corridors of Blood and First Man Into Space.

But delays on Corridors developed and since interest in the fledgling world space program was heating up, it was decided to release First Man Into Space immediately, rather than waiting for a suitable replacement to be either filmed or purchased. First appeared as either a main or supporting feature, depending upon where you saw it. Corridors of Blood eventually suffered perhaps the ultimate indignity, being co-billed with Werewolf in a Girl's Dormitory.

Fiend was, meanwhile, making friends throughout the world. New York City movie-goers may remember seeing the creatures in person. Gordon devised a "touring exhibit" of the monsters at theatres where the film was shown. This plan further heightened interest and excitement at the Rialto Theatre, but MGM considered the promotion too cumbersome and expensive to continue.

By the time First Man Into Space was released, in early 1959, science fact was fast overtaking science fiction, even though man would not walk on the moon for another decade.

Though the film is dated today, in that the story centers around X-15 style flights gone awry, the movie is not even now scientifically invalid nor weak on technology.

Again, the screenplay came to Gordon via his brother Alex. Titled Satellite of Blood, it was written by Wyatt Ordung, whose career never evolved despite his competent direction of the first Roger Corman produced genre film, Monster from the Ocean Floor. Ordung also scripted Phil Tucker's infamous Robot Monster.



Top: A shot of the monster from FIRST MAN INTO SPACE emphasizing the striking black-and-white photography; Bottom: Director Robert Day (left) poses with star Marshall Thompson on the set.



Gordon recalls Satellite of Blood as being just what the title implies, a more-or-less straight ahead monster film. The script was rewritten by Croydon, as John C. Cooper, a name he often employed as a screenwriter and mystery novelist, and co-producer Charles Vetter Jr., writing as Lance Z. Hargreaves. It toned down on the horror and concentrated on scientific accuracy and pathos for monster man Edwards. Not only did Gordon like the improvement, but he notes that, in a recent interview Ordung expressed approval as well.

The astronaut as unwilling monster theme had been created in 1952, with the BBC's Quatermass Experiment, which was later filmed and eventually released in American as The Creeping Unknown. Gordon does not recollect any conscious effort to make an astronaut-monster in the tradition of Creeping Unknown but believes the spectre of the success of the first film was on the minds of the production crew.

Robert Day, who had helmed The Haunted Strangler, was named director. Gordon suspects that Day probably would have made Fiend With a Face too under other circumstances. But, though it was possible to overlap some of the Producers Associates team, it would clearly have been unwise for Day to divide his time between two films that were virtually in production at the same time.

Day later directed a series of Tarzan films for Croydon, then came to America where he found a niche with made-for-television movies. Gordon recalls his three picture association with Day as being both "fruitful and pleasurable."

To give First Man Into Space a properly scientific feel, Gordon obtained de-classified footage of American rocket plane tests. These were integrated with close-ups of Edwards in the cockpit and special effects scenes created by Ruppel. This included a sequence in which the plane flies through a storm of meteorite dust, actually sequins blown about by a fan. This dust, nature's way of protecting objects floating through space from cosmic rays (and also the subject of Richard Carlson's Riders to the Stars), coats both the space ship and Edwards.

Gordon is pleased by the quality of the special effects and believes that, even though contemporary audiences are used to more sophisticated models today, it still takes a sharp eye to determine where the stock footage leaves off and studio made scenes begin. Though, on one hand he wishes the film had been made in color, Gordon notes that the black and white photography helped the cause of the effects team, because monochrome made it easier to match the various footage. It would have been a far trickier and difficult matter to duplicate the various hues and quality of color between "real" and effects scenes. In retrospect, First Man Into Space is a significant

Astronaut Bill Edwards before his transformation into the monster of FIRST MAN INTO SPACE. He is characterized by arrogance.



sci-fi film if for no other reason than it predates and anticipates the U.S. shuttle program and the use of space for medical experiments nearly a quarter century before such concepts were actually translated into newspaper headlines.

The method by which Edwards is put into space is a variation on the present shuttle launching procedure. The Y-12 and its successors were carried inside the "belly" of a conventional military craft whereupon it is released and fires its own engines, allowing orbit to be reached. It all smacks of pseudo-documentary, at a time when other sci-fi films had a more comic book flavor.

The Y-12 (simply the increasing of a letter and dropping of a few numbers from the X-15) is the filmmakers' variation on the American space program. Peter Besthorn, an aeronautical engineer, built the production's model craft, complete with a simulated booster rocket. The model was photographed by Ruppel, who utilized blue backing, super-imposition, and traveling mattes.

The film also introduced scientifically accurate concepts of disorientation because of lack of oxygen for at least a partial explanation, other than sheer arrogance, for why Edwards refuses to follow orders. Finally, the encrustation and bubbling of nitrogen in his blood removes the carbon dioxide and causes him to become a monster.

Edwards returns to Earth as a modern vampire, who in his panic, attempts to drink blood from fresh-killed victims to replace his evaporating supply. He also lumbers about, hardly able to speak or breathe, because of the new "skin" that now covers him. The make-up on Edwards is unique and the final scenes, with him struggling for breath while peering through one eye, renders him appropriately sympathetic.

The monster was, Gordon recalls, most frightening for Edwards himself. Because the special effects makeup was primitive, compared to today's standards, improvements in the art form to allow for longer and more comfortable use had not yet come about. Edwards could stand the monster "costume" for only brief periods of time before shortness of breath and weakness set in. Perhaps he knew how his character really felt.

As the discomfort increased, the time that Edwards was willing to spend inside the make-up decreased. Eventually, because the scenes in which he was not "in costume" had already been filmed, he was allowed to return to American. A stunt-man/actor was hired to lurch and speak as required.

But the dialogue, spoken beneath the encrustation, was barely audible and a third actor was later brought in to speak the lines on the soundtrack. This may have worked out for the best, as the re-

Star Bill Edwards (or is it his double?) after his transformation, struggling for breath, now becomes a very sympathetic character.





voicing enabled the proper balance between audibility and pathos, as the dying astronaut explains the sensations he is experiencing beneath the new skin.

As noted, First Man Into Space has its roots in The Creeping Unknown and the similarities to and differences from the Quaterness film are both strong and weak points. In The Creeping Unknown, we have considerable empathy for victim Richard Wordsworth. His metamorphosis into a monster (which begins as a fungus on his hand and grows until it not only consumes him but much of Westminster Abbey) is slow and disturbing.

We don't altogether have the opportunity to view Edwards in the same light. As presented in the early going, he is highly irresponsible, disobeying ground orders not to take the shuttle higher when he should be returning home. Crashing the Y-12, he hitches a ride to the apartment of girlfriend Marla Landi from where he has to be retrieved by his brother, and mission commander, Thompson. In contrast, Wordsworth is a complete innocent and victim who in no way contributed to his downfall.

And, because the Edwards metamorphosis takes place entirely off screen, we don't become personally involved in his deterioration. Director Val Guest made considerable use of the pathos angle in Creeping Unknown and William Sachs carried the formula still further, in 1977, with the like-themed but otherwise terrible Incredible Melting Man.

Edwards [Though it has been established that some scenes featured another actor doubling for Bill Edwards, the name "Edwards" is used throughout the article to prevent confusion.] ultimately realizes who he is and finds his way back to the space center where he knows German expatriate scientist Carl Jaffe is waiting to help him. Jaffe induces him back to the space simulator (in a scene heightened by striking black and white photography with the astronaut appearing mostly as an oversized shadow on the walls) where, with the help of Thompson, his life is temporarily preserved. He can once again, literally, breathe easier.

Though Thompson is willing to sacrifice himself by manning the chamber controls, Edwards renders this unnecessary by dying of his cosmic disease, leaving our hero to be comforted by Ms. Landi.

The straight forward resolution is low-key and differs from other films in the 50s creature cycle, in which more flamboyant means were found to dispose of unwanted monsters. This could also have been done here, since the military was on hand with flame-throwers at the ready to turn on Edwards at the slightest provocation. But Thompson's superior, Robert Ayres, forbids this. The final reel might

Actor Bill Edwards experienced discomfort while wearing the primitive monster suit required in FIRST MAN INTO SPACE.



have been more exciting (albeit typical) if Ayres had been overruled, but it would have not been in keeping with the level of pathos that all involved were apparently attempting to capture.

Though the romance sub-plot in Fiend Without a Face tended toward the obvious, Day presents this obligatory aspect of First Man Into Space in a more restrained way. First, there is no triangle, probably because Edwards has already undergone his transformation before Thompson and Ms. Landi show any interest in each other. Beyond this, Day keeps the relationship just ambiguous enough so that we never know if the pair are simply sharing a common loss or if Thompson will replace his brother in Ms. Landi's bed.

Though the concept of a space mission being used to lay the ground work for space science anticipated the '80s, it is difficult to believe Ms. Landi, a European actress-model, in her role as the space center's resident scientific genius. Her academic credentials never seem as obvious as some of her other attributes and she was certainly more believable as the femme fatale of Hammer's Hound of the Baskervilles, produced at about the same time.

But some of the casting is interesting. Note Jaffe's German scientist. The character is obviously patterned after Dr. Werner von Braun, portrayed cinematically just months later by Curt Jurgens in I Aim at the Stars. We assume, immediately, that Jaffe was on "the other side" during World War II, but no specific mention is ever made of this.

Unfortunately, screenwriters Cooper and Hargreaves (aka Croydon and Vetter) felt it necessary to end the film by having Jaffe pronounce that the exploration of new worlds always makes demands on human life, but that there will always be those willing to take the risk. Boy, have we heard that one before.

It is interesting (and a bit curious) to note that in the Variety review of Fiend no mention is made of the "Americanization" except to note that the film was "made in Britain for Metro" and set in "a U.S. Canadian air base and radar station." In February 1959, the same critic notes that the U.S. setting is "an interesting technical point" and that "the cast is generally acceptable in employing American accents."

Looking back over the films from a distance of 30 years, Gordon sees Fiend as having legitimate status as "a minor classic" of the '50s but First as being more of a "curio" today.

According to Gordon, Fiend holds up remarkably well, even with changes and advances in effects technology; it can still be viewed with a sense of wonder and appreciation. He is, for this reason, considering a re-make, complete with color and state-of-the-art "big budget" effects, something not available to him for the original.

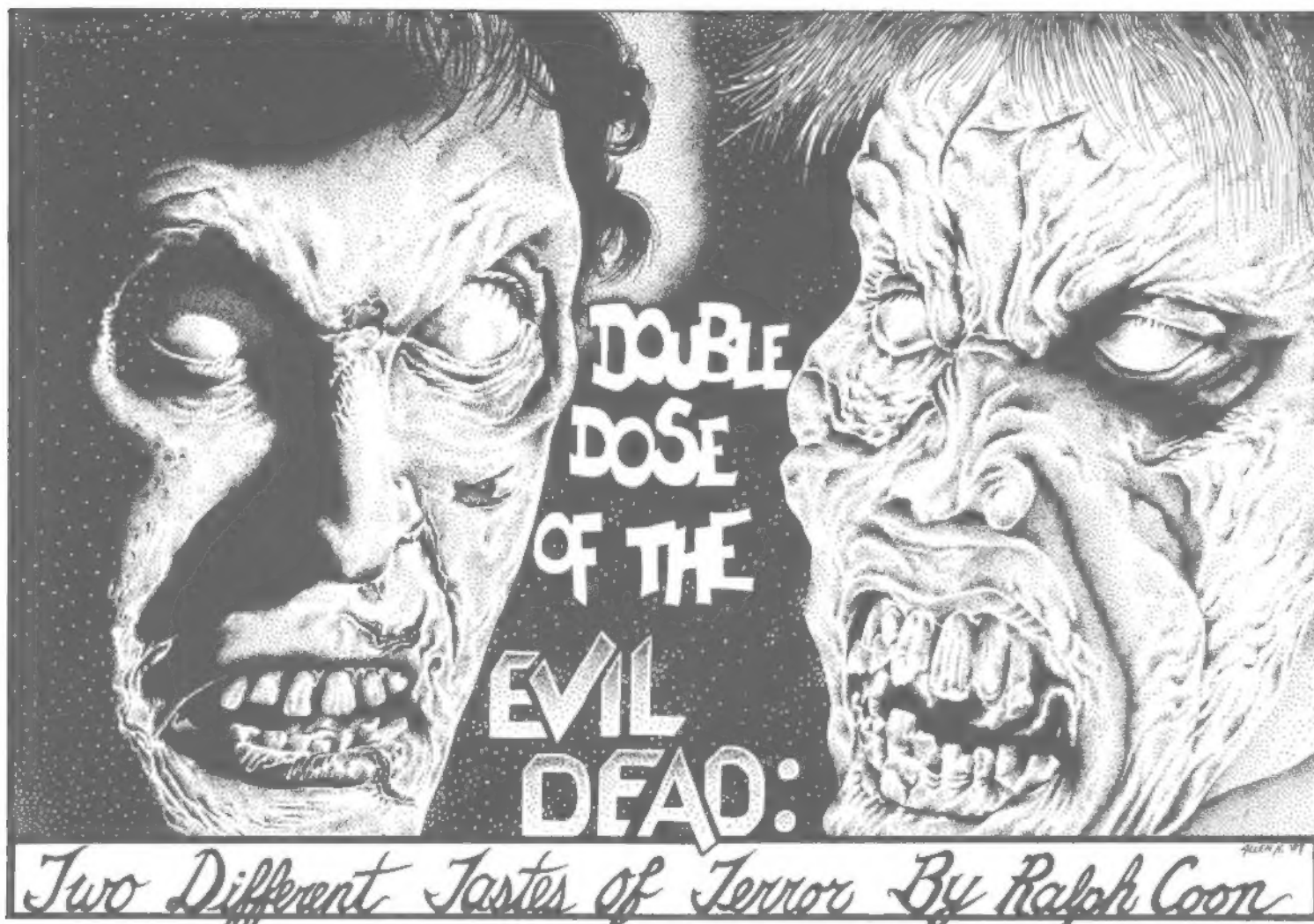
In contrast, while he still likes First Man Into Space, and both Fiend and First, were highly successful financially, he wouldn't consider remaking the later at all. In a phrase, he terms it "much too outdated."

Yet, it should be noted that though the idea of reaching the fringes of space is not relevant today, it is still—in this sophisticated era—difficult to find fault with the "authenticity" of the concepts dramatized in the film.

One thing Gordon wishes he had done, however, is make both in color. While this would have been unusual for the time, he believes it could and should have been done, considering that Hammer was relying heavily on color, as were their major competition, Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman, with films such as Henry Cass' Blood of the Vampire and Baker's Jack the Ripper.

But, then again, considering the reviews and response of the censors to Fiend Without a Face, as it was, the sight of flying brains oozing, exploding, and gushing in "metrocolor" might have been a bit much.

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As the sun beats down on Wadesboro, North Carolina, pushing the mercury beyond the 90s into the 100s, *The Evil Dead II* rolls before the camera at the railway speed of 16 to 18 setups a day.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," director Sam Raimi jokingly shouts, "Tonight for your pleasure, Bruce Campbell, star of *The Evil Dead II*, will perform an incredible stunt before your very eyes. He will tumble down these stairs with a camera attached to his jaw. I've tried to convince him not to, but he feels he must!"

Laughter drifts through the interior cabin set, housed in a vacant high school, until electronic bells sound signaling the crew to cut the chatter. Silence moves like a wave over the set.

"Action," Raimi says softly.

The hero, Ash (Bruce Campbell), wildly runs up the basement stairs, only to find the door locked. To make matters worse, a cellar-dwelling demon awakes to the scent of a fresh soul.

"Cut," Raimi shrieks, almost laughing. "That was the coolest, Bruce!"

With his words, the production crew once again becomes a hectic ballet troupe, each moving with his or her own distinct purpose, preparing for the next shot.

Raimi, a medium-sized man harboring excessive baby fat around his cheeks, sports a pair of Dee Cee overalls. He looks like an artistic Gomer Pyle.

"It (*Evil Dead II*) is a different picture. I thought about doing it in 16mm and blowing it up to 35mm to give it that 'Docu-Horror' look, but I already did that. I don't want to remake the old picture. *Evil Dead II* has many of the same story elements and characters as the first one," Raimi states, sitting Indian-style on the cellar's sand floor, quite comfortable in his terrifying surroundings. "I don't look at it as better or worse, just different."

"The ultimate experience in grueling terror."

-Last credit on *Evil Dead* and *Evil Dead II*.

*The Evil Dead* was, for the most part, received warmly. Stephen King's blurb: "The most ferociously original horror film of the year" and *Los Angeles Times* writer Kevin Thomas': "An instant classic," help put a spotlight on the film. However, *The Evil Dead* has such a unique flavor, it left no room for indifference. Movie goers either loved it or hated it. And the ones that hated, truly hated. "Just how bad can a movie be? *Evil Dead* makers show you," screamed the *Arkansas Gazette*. Film critic Bill Cosford was more destructively witty: "Just because your neighbor will do his Hamlet at parties for free does not mean that he is Laurence Olivier or even Rich Little. And making a bad movie on the cheap is not much of an achievement." Being a younger artist, Raimi is obviously still flustered by scathing remarks made about him and his work. "They're (bad reviews) fine. Whatever," he deadpans with abjection. "I just hope the audience members enjoy themselves when they watch my pictures."

"You don't appreciate cream unless you've drunk a lot of milk, and maybe you don't even appreciate milk unless you've drunk some that's gone sour."

-Stephen King

The horror film is the staple of the movie industry. More than any other genre of film, the horror movie possesses a life span of endless longevity. Many film makers use this to their advantage. Francis Ford Coppola broke into the industry by helming Roger Corman's episodic *Dementia 13*. Similarly, Tobe Hooper, John Carpenter, George Romero, and Joe Dante have also used the low budget shock-horror film as a ticket into the mainstream film world. "I knew that if I made a horror picture, I could get the money and make a movie," Raimi says. "That was the motivator."

It stands to reason that if the horror film is the easiest type of film to get made, then it's probably the hardest film to make well. With the popularity of video, little known horror films that had





Returning hero, Bruce Campbell (Ash), surrounded by his team of supporters: Sarah Berry, Dan Hicks, and Kassie Wesley [L-R].

limited release or no release at all are now getting the chance at larger exposure. Films shot directly on video and made available only in video shops are also becoming commonplace. This rise in video availability is both good and bad. Without video, The Evil Dead would surely not have gained the momentum it did. "Video awareness was very important to us," stated Renaissance Picture's president Robert Tabert. "It played a major part in the possibility of there being a second Evil Dead film." Also on video there are a lot of lesser known horror films, lesser known for good reasons. "We've seen a lot of horror movies," Campbell states. "Most of them were soooooo bad. Boredom is the ultimate crime a filmmaker can commit. We decided good, bad, or indifferent, our horror films wouldn't be boring."

A key factor in the Evil Dead films' lack of boredom is in the pacing. Editors Edna Ruth Paul (Evil I) and Kaye Davis (Evil II) keep the action propped tight and fast so that there is no time to dwell on the utter morbidity happening on the screen. Unlike most horror films, the Evil Dead films have enough energy to fuel themselves and then some. The action is so intense that even commonplace objects are vibrating with life all their own. Lamps, books, and taxidermic deer heads constantly shriek hysterically at characters on the brink (Evil II).

The cabin, with its seemingly inexhaustible cavernous interior, gushes in multi-colored blood like a geyser (Evil I and Evil II). Decapitated heads, hands, eyeballs, and other assorted limbs taunt and tease the film's hero (Evil II). Nothing is wasted, nothing just sits there.

The obscure camera angles found throughout the Evil Dead films are premeditated with story-board certainty. "We try to make the films as interesting as possible. Put the camera in a place that would show what was happening the clearest," says Raimi. In fact, he does this so well that his films might be a triumph of style over substance. But in horror films, some would argue that substance doesn't matter as much. Film producer Irwin Yablins once said, "They (audiences) don't want a lot of mumbo jumbo. They want results—effects. Before John Carpenter shot Halloween I told him, I don't care why this guy is scaring people. Just make 'em jump." If there is any core to the Evil Dead films, then it is in the hands of Bruce Campbell's character, Ash. If Ash doesn't believe in what's going on around him, neither do we. Like Don Coscarelli's Phantasm, the stories in both Evil Dead films are ambiguously ludicrous. "Just what are ancient demons doing in backwood's America?" nemeses of the films argue. Ash believes all of it to be true, so it is. This is a difficult task for Campbell to pull off, and it's a toast to his talent that he does. He goes through his steps with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy. If he's tired, he never lets us know. He's the metronome for the frenzy around him. His facial expressions are priceless, all the way from the tip of his quizzical eyebrows to the milky white of his eyes. Campbell strongly believes his character is the substantive balance to Raimi's stylistic camera. "No matter what happens to my character in The Evil Dead movies—he



Bruce Campbell, in typical pose, prepares to do battle once again with the horrors from EVIL DEAD II. Splatter slapstick????

gets kicked, bit—he always gets up to keep fighting for what's right. You can call it a gore feast or total exploitation, but I don't care. Deep down my character is a decent guy."

With the combination of minimum critical dialogue and punishing action, the Evil Dead films speak a bizarre, universal language. Like slap-stick comedy, The Evil Dead I's nasty edge wasn't lost when dialogue was translated into different languages for foreign markets. In the film, the action is based on what is done as opposed to what is said.

"A liberal dose of the absurd, not the degree of bloodshed, is what separates one kind of splatter movie from another."

—author John McCarty

The Evil Dead films are very much alike and very much different. Both contain machine gun action. But, The Evil Dead II is slightly more stilted in its sense of wonder. If one looks sharply at The Evil Dead I, bits and pieces of black humor are noticeable, but barely. In Evil II the screen is "bleeding" with dubious humor. One possibility could be the influence of Scott Spiegel. Spiegel, who was only a ghoul in Evil I, now contributes to the story of Evil II. Co-written with Raimi, Spiegel's influence seems to dominate the goofy screenplay. Spiegel pumps the film with zany action reminiscent of his earlier efforts, Cleveland Smith, and Torro, Torro, Torro.

The absolute joy of the Evil Dead screenplays is the cleverness of their creators. Predictable they are not. The evil comes from every angle in every form. Nothing is bound by rules, nothing is too outlandish. In perhaps Evil Dead II's finest moment, Ash is threatened by a kitchen cluttered with dirty dishes. The evil



spirits have taken control of Ash's hand and proceed to make him smash dishes over his head. With a film so packed full of Three Stooges type entertainment, the signal becomes clear. The joyful noise of Evil Dead II can't possibly be taken seriously.

The humor in Evil Dead I is less and substantially subtler. Ash screams and slaps Scotty after he's been attacked by the forest demon, trying like a demented physical comedian to awaken him. In the basement Ash steps in a puddle of blood, where a box of Band Aids floats aimlessly, while simultaneously a movie projector projects a screen with blood running from the top of the screen to the bottom. Depending on your level of jest, this may be horror or it might be comedy. In the eyes of its creators, it's all the same thing. It just hinges on how they deliver their punchline.

It is impossible to compare and contrast the two pictures. It's like apples and oranges; they taste different. It's a tale of two demons. The Evil Dead I's demons are serious about the situation at hand. Search and destroy, no fooling around. The demons in The Evil Dead II have a little twisted fun at Ash's expense. They toy with Ash analogous to the way a cat toys with a mouse before the kill. It's a horrific game.

"...low budget films are often the work of auteurs, people who can do as much as they like without a committee of financiers looking gloomily over their shoulders. Such film makers are often young, hungry, and ambitious, and their films may reflect the slightly desperate vigour such a state induces."

-author Peter Nicholls

After the day's filming wraps at the Evil Dead II interior cabin set, the crew heads towards the school auditorium, which has been converted into a movie theater. They sit slouched with their feet slung over the chairs in front of them. Raimi sits in the front row by himself, carefully taking notes. Most appropriately, as soon as



Top: Kassie Wesley is attacked by a possessed Richard Dornseier from EVIL DEAD II. Note the improved demon makeup; Bottom: The youthful director of both EVIL DEAD and EVIL DEAD II, Sam Raimi, sets up a shot on location. Even though both EVIL DEAD films contain similarities, they also attempt to do different things.

the projector rolls, a severe thunder storm cascades down on Wadesboro. As lightning whipcracks outside, the crew members congratulate each other on their work. After about twenty minutes of thorough entertainment, the lights fade up and the crew shuffles out. Raimi rises to leave, and a confident grin comes over his face. It's obvious that the creators of The Evil Dead films, in a bizarre way, are on their way up. But, since their films cannot be fit into a simple category for easy reference, unfortunately, they will not be seen by as many people as they should.

Keep biting your nails, Sam.





Deep in the wilds of Gleason, Wisconsin, a state known primarily for its brutally cold, snowy winters as well as being the cheese capital of the United States, stands the Shooting Ranch Studio. From this unlikely studio complex, movies such as Demons of Ludlow, The Alpha Incident, Rana the Legend of Shadow Lake, among others, have been made. Unfamiliar with those film titles? You can find them in your local video store; and they are the product of independent filmmaker Bill Rebane. You say you've never heard of the man or his movies? Rebane was responsible for Giant Spider Invasion, which grossed a whopping \$13,000,000, and he directed the main bulk of that infamous grade-Z movie lovers' classic, Monster a Go-Go. Although some people credit Herschell Gordon Lewis with directing it under the pseudonym of Seymour Sheldon, Lewis actually shot scenes of feet walking and hands holding telegrams to complete the unfinished picture which ceased production when Rebane ran out of money. Rebane also worked with Lewis on some industrial films and Lewis's own Lucky Pierre and Blood Feast. Following a nine year stint at Studio Bendesdorf in Europe, Rebane returned to the United States settling down in Wisconsin to produce Invasion from Inner Earth, which launched his career as a successful independent feature filmmaker.

For those of you laboring under the misconception that the Shooting Ranch Studio is nothing more than a garage containing one 35mm movie camera and a few pieces of well-used equipment, the complex includes a sound stage besides boasting a complete film production facility. The only facilities Rebane's studio isn't equipped for is the lab work and the audio mixing.

This interview proves to would be and struggling filmmakers outside the reaches of Hollywood that yes, with hard work, determination and ambition, becoming a successful feature filmmaker is indeed possible.

JV: Previous to your first feature film Monster a Go-Go (originally titled Terror at Halfday), what was your experience in filmmaking?

BR: Limited. I was scared to hell making that sucker. Now if you

would believe this, I hadn't edited, shot, directed, produced, or anything of that nature before. Didn't know that did you? (laughter)

JV: No I didn't. According to the book, The Amazing Herschell Gordon Lewis, you were a relative amateur at the time.

BR: Oh I absolutely was, without question. I think I was nineteen years old or something like that. However, I had a reasonably extensive background in television production both producing and directing at that age. I was involved in the production of the first 360 degree picture shot with one camera, projected with one projector, which was a revolutionary process at that time. I don't know if you remember Disney Circle-Rama. Circle-Rama was done with sixteen cameras and sixteen projectors. Well, we did the same thing with one camera and one projector and achieved the same effect. Or I should say a more spectacular effect. That certainly was an involvement in motion pictures, but I was the promoter, I owned the American rights to it and everything. I decided one day I was going to make a feature. I went out and raised the money and set out to make a feature.

JV: What was the budget for Monster a Go-Go before you ran out of money to finish it?

BR: I think we had a budget of \$80,000. We started with \$20,000, went to about \$25,000 or \$30,000, and then the last \$12,000 or \$15,000 wasn't there, so we had to stop production. We couldn't hold on to Pete Thompson (the scientist in the film) and Doc Stanford came in. Doc Stanford was a music writer, music producer, and screenplay writer. He did "Fairy Tales" for Sinatra, and he wrote with Jimmy Van Heusen. To make a long story short, he came in, we rewrote the whole thing, and being short on money, he took the part of the scientist. We wrote him in as the brother of Pete Thompson. And that's how we changed the story. We had a lot of good footage, and I mean a lot of good footage, considering the circumstances. When I did look at the picture ultimately, this is

years ago that I saw the whole thing assembled, a good portion of it was not there. I mean the close ups, the medium shots, a lot of action stuff that was done in Chicago but was not in the picture. It ended up having to be cut any way possible, I suppose.

JV: How did Herschell Gordon Lewis end up with the film?

BR: Herschell was a maverick feature producer at that time and had just finished Prime Time and one of the other pictures. He came in much later, came to think of it. Yes, he came in a few years later because we had the footage around. I had started cutting it or recutting it, and that's when he came in and we made a deal.

JV: Did you know that Lewis turned your movie into a satire?

BR: I didn't know it at the time, no.

JV: Were you upset about it since your film was originally intended to be serious?

BR: No, I was not upset. I had to close my eyes and turn away in shame. It came out not at all as we intended it to be. Upset is probably overstating it.

JV: I understand you worked on a few of Lewis's films. What was it like to work with him?

BR: It was wham, bang, thank you ma'am: fast and furious. He's a very unique guy and he was able to do everything from producing, raising money, to doing his own photography, doing his own sound, directing, editing—you name it. He was a very clever and talented guy. I'm sure if he would have chosen to do other types of pictures, he would've been very successful.

JV: What did you do between Monster a Go-Go and Giant Spider Invasion because there seems to be a big gap?

BR: Oh, there's a big gap (laughter). I did a lot of short subjects, which at the time was a big thing, including one that became quite popular, probably as popular as Giant Spider Invasion years later. It was called Twist Race, a musical which was sold to American International Pictures. We followed that with Dance Craze. Then we did one called The Love of Stella and another one called All Fall Down. They were quite unique because they were all original: a lot of music, a lot of dancing, very colorful. We put the first ones together very fast. Twist Race was shot in one night, and of course, in 35mm, color, the whole pizzazz. The original music and the story were created two nights previous to that. That particular one became quite popular because it was the first twist picture out. It played as a co-feature to Pocketful of Miracles, Frank Capra's picture, all over the country in first-run theaters. Universal made an offer to buy it and get it nominated for the Academy Award. We couldn't meet the last play-date. In other words, in order to qualify you have to play a key theatre in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York by a certain date, and we couldn't get into New York. It was close to the due date. But never the less, it enjoyed a great deal of success and made a lot of money. Now meanwhile, I went back to Europe, where I'm from originally, and I was in charge of production for Studio Bendersdorf for close to nine years. We did How I Won the War; Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang; Dollar with Goldie Hawn; and The Final Guns for Columbia Pictures. I was involved in that for two and a half years, as the executive producer and director of three one hour episodes. That was supposed to be the first roadshow picture or first mini-series type film. That picture was the turning point because it went on and on and on with lots of problems, and that made me return to the States. I was so sick of the business, I was never going to make another picture again.

JV: From there did you go on to make Giant Spider Invasion?

BR: That was the third picture that I did out of Wisconsin. The first one was Invasion from Inner Earth. It's getting a lot of television play all over the country, and here people keep calling me



Sitting on location at his "Shooting Ranch Studio" underneath a model of the "giant spider," Bill Rebane strikes a serious pose.

and telling me they saw it. That was done at the end of 1972.

JV: What was Invasion from Inner Earth about?

BR: That was a science-fiction type psychological thriller made in northern Wisconsin. It's a psychological drama: four people lost in the wilderness being haunted by something that is coming from the inner earth, an alien type thing. Then we departed and did an NBC special on snowmobiling called The Roar of Snowmobiles. Then came the Spider picture.

JV: How were you able to do that kind of picture for only \$350,000?

BR: Well, it was partly because of the geographic area. I mean, it's cheap to shoot here, and having the right story that was tailor made for the resources we had helped to keep the budget manageable. In the meantime, I had considerable amount of years in production, in all phases of production, so I was able to use a small crew.

JV: So being in Wisconsin, you wouldn't have to use the SAG or any union crews when you make a film?

BR: We did. Giant Spider Invasion was a SAG picture. It had to be simply because of the names involved.

JV: Was Giant Spider Invasion your biggest film financially as well as being the most widely released theatrically?

BR: Absolutely. It was one of the fifty top grossing films of that



year. It was on the charts as one of the all time rental champions. The last public quote I heard about it was on the Johnny Carson show, I think, somewhere around '77.

JV: Since the film gave you legs as an independent filmmaker, did Group One release any more of your movies?

BR: Group One made all the money on the Spider picture. We landed up pretty poor. As a matter of fact, this year, 1987, is the year where we're supposed to cash in our nonrecourse notes, and it was a tax shelter to boot. The distributor made one hell of a lot of money. Anyway, the figure that Carson quoted was about \$13,000,000, and for '75-'76, those were big numbers.

JV: Since you didn't end up with very much money, did you ever go into litigation with Group One?

BR: We came close to it. We did audits which didn't go anywhere, which cost a lot of money. After a year or two years of hassles and what have you, unless you have the resources to keep fighting a lawsuit for long periods of time, it's senseless. At the time, I wasn't as well versed on distribution and I think we made a bad deal. We probably should've been more cautious from the beginning. But everybody made deals like that in those days. You didn't have the foreign markets to go to; you didn't have the independence you have today.

JV: At any time during your career did you ever four wall one of your films?

BR: Yes we did. As a matter of fact, we did a little bit of that with Invasion from Inner Earth. We released it initially ourselves, then Key International picked it up in Denver, and then American National ended up with it.

JV: This brings me to my next question. As an independent, do you find it harder to deal with distributors than if you were connected to a major studio?

BR: It used to be that way. Things have changed considerably since 1979-1980. They have changed in particular since the foreign market and foreign video became strong. The Star Wars pictures changed a lot of things. It changed things for the low budget producer because suddenly the American public was looking at millions of dollars worth of special-effects, production values, and what have you. The small picture that could've been released independently theatrically or even by the producer if he had the right backing, all of a sudden, somewhere around '79, you couldn't do that anymore. The pictures that we did up until 1980-81 suddenly were no longer placeable theatrically, because theatrically, the demand was different.

JV: Since the demands for theatrical films became different, wouldn't your films wind up playing the drive-in circuit?

BR: Absolutely. But that was always the strength for these little pictures, the drive-in market.

JV: Now that the drive-ins are dying, mainly because of spiraling real estate costs and the popularity of the VCR, what is your opinion of the demise of the drive-in theatre?

BR: Well, video's done it. Let's face it: cable, satellite, the video market, but thank God for the video market for the independent. The theatrical market is awful tough today, especially for the small picture. If you make a picture and it happens to have legs, and you think, shit, this will go theatrically, sure you can do something theatrically. But if it just falls short of that, thank God you've got the international market. Without that, we would be in tough shape. And I mean we, all of the independents.

JV: By the way, I saw your film The Alpha Incident on TV recently. I thought it was a tight, suspenseful picture. Was that film fairly easy to make, or did you have any trouble during the production?

BR: No, that was a pleasure. I kind of enjoyed that. It had a bit of a challenge connected with it, because it's very difficult to sustain four people for ninety-minutes in two rooms. It was a step toward the type of thing that I wanted to do and it did enjoy a pretty good theatrical run. I don't know if you know this, but Alpha Incident played as a co-feature to Star Wars in tons of theatres throughout the country.

JV: As you continue to make films, do the budgets increase significantly?

BR: It varies. You've got to remember, since I've been in Wisconsin, I've been splitting my time building up our studio complex here. We have probably the most unique production complex in the country. The name of the studio complex is the Shooting Ranch Studio.

JV: Because you are an independent filmmaker, is raising the financial backing for your projects difficult?

BR: That's always the most difficult thing of the whole business. You know, it's easy to make a picture, but to get a decent distribution deal that returns money to the investors ultimately is extremely difficult. This is a universal problem. This is not my problem; I think it's every independent's problem. When you begin to have distributors go broke, they have your picture and they go bankrupt. Suddenly you don't have a picture. You have problems paying back your investors, therefore, it's difficult to get more money for another film. I have a philosophy that if distributors would play ball with the producers and do their thing properly, some

Below: Two stills from Bill Rabene's largest grossing film to date, THE GIANT SPIDER INVASION. Rabene saw no profit.





of these problems would've been eliminated a long time ago. But you just can't expect that because of the nature of the beast. Of all the pictures I have done, they all have grossed decent or big amounts of money. They've all made money for the distributors. None of them landed up on a shelf and was buried. That's unfortunate, because some of that success should've been passed on to the investors.

JV: Did you ever consider doing what Tom Laughlin, who made the Billy Jack series, did: set up your own distribution company?

BR: We did. And as a matter of fact, it started with The Capture of Bugfoot. We released it initially ourselves. As a matter of fact, right out of here, we got over five hundred bookings nationally. We started with one hundred prints, but the ongoing cost of advertising was too humongous. So finally we made a deal with another distributor; distribution takes more capital than production does. And as of late, since 1980-81, we've been marketing foreign ourselves. We've done reasonably, if not very well, in that area.

JV: A lot of regional filmmakers end up moving to Los Angeles because they think that's where the action is as far as movie-making is concerned. Have you ever considered moving your base of operations to Los Angeles?

BR: Nope. Never. Now, that is not to say that I would not make a picture in L.A. But I certainly wouldn't want to get into that rat race. That sounds kind of stubborn, but there is too much potential here to grow with and you can't beat the costs.

JV: Especially when using a union crew in Los Angeles you can't bring in a film for less than two or three hundred thousand dollars.

BR: Besides, there's a tremendous waste out there. I don't want to go on making pictures for a couple of hundred thousand dollars or three hundred thousand dollars. But even if you make a picture for a million, I mean, it would have to cost two million there, and I doubt very much that you could with that enhancement of dollars equally enhance the production value there. Certainly some things call for

large expenditures. I mean, Hollywood is Hollywood. But in most cases it's just a total waste.

JV: As someone who's seen the ins and outs of independent filmmaking and distribution, what advice would you give to a filmmaker just coming into the business?

BR: I suppose the first thing is to make sure he's got a good script, a good gut feeling about it. Know the market place; you've got to know what is selling. What are the ingredients that are making it today? Then either find a screenplay that has all of those ingredients, or tailor make one. You know, nobody takes advice in this business (laughter).

JV: Are you planning to make any more films in the horror/science-fiction genre?

BR: We are. Oh absolutely, we just finished one. I think it's a great horror story with Tiny Tim. It's a picture called Blood Harvest and it's a classic horror story. It's a bit unusual because of his character. He is marvelous in it, absolutely marvelous. It's a big looking picture. I'm very proud of that one. It'll be released somewhere around March.

JV: One of your films that I'm curious about is The Game. What's that about?

BR: That's the one I don't want to talk about. (laughter) No, no, God, no. There's two pictures I don't want to talk about at all. One is Monster a Go-Go and the other one is The Game.

JV: Well then, we'll just skip that one entirely (laughter).

BR: There's nothing I can do about it if somebody sees it. Listen, whaddya want for \$25,000, right? That beats any of Herschell's budgets, I want you to know. What might be significant, which always boggles peoples' minds, when you think in terms of The Game for that kind of cash, Demons of Ludlow was made for \$120,000. The Devonsville Terror was \$165,000. Alpha Incident, that was a high budget picture, was \$220,000. I think the biggest problem we've had on our pictures, if I may mention that, is that when you're on these low budgets, you have to get actors from your local area. That's something that I'm going to try not to repeat too often, because you're stuck with a certain quality of talent. I think these are the biggest shortcomings. Then maybe the other shortcoming, if any, is that I'm not a blood and guts man for blood and guts' sake. Distributors are always accusing me of not putting enough flesh, blood, and guts into my pictures. My films are a bit mild. So in Blood Harvest, we gave them the full nine yards.

JV: Let's say if someone were to give you a very large budget, I'm talking millions of dollars, what kind of film would you make?

BR: I have some pet projects on the shelf that I would love to do. I have a love story; I have a teenage action picture which it looks like we're going to be doing anyway next summer. That's a contemporary story totally removed from the horror/science-fiction genre. And there are some large scale projects which we have been kicking around. But at the moment we're taking it a step at a time. We have a line up of two to three pictures for the next year that are going to be in the \$400,000 to \$1,000,000 category.

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In his early career of guerrilla scare schlockmanship, William Castle was a hokum broker nagged by rationalist conscience. He wanted his horrors to generate the kind of word of mouth that would still be talked about after the films left town, but remembering his apprenticeship in civilized suspense, he may have been afraid of looking like a fool if the films didn't work dramatically. Such things as "Emergo" and "Percepto" were extrusions of storylines thought up to accommodate Total Experience. In logic, Castle defeated himself. He placed intelligence behind many of the shocks so they could be sensibly analyzed, but so flamboyant were they that most were a face slap to common credulity. It didn't matter as entertainment and Castle had enough work pride to see that the movies in their naked narrative where at least passably scary (although anyone who screamed in the audience was usually a paid ringer).

Castle's major theme is best attitudinized by the Human Conspiracy element in House on Haunted Hill, where native "ghosts" were subliminally suggested by night-bumping noises and the alcoholic imaginings of outwardly impeachable Watson Pritchard. After his success at Allied Artists, Castle returned to his old home Columbia, where he finally built up the confidence to create a true fantasy menace with The Tingler. The limitations of its monster, or monsters (since every spine incubates a latent tingler) were turned to advantage by yet another Drive Someone Crazy development. By now, Castle was freebasing on fumes of Gaslight...his generic When In Doubt resort.

Another way Castle was getting in a rut was in his tunnel vision noir seeing the world through the blackest dark glasses. House on Haunted Hill expected us to feel the worst about ghosts, but there are nice ghosts as well as malefic ones and in 1960 Castle took off the kid gloves of sensible denouement again phenomenon-wise, with 13 Ghosts. This time Castle appeared to be expanding the premise of films that imitated his: the picture in question Screaming Skull, where the true occult made itself known but hung back while a conspirator set up his own shock shop.

13 Ghosts was Castle's first attempt at a family shocker. The Cleavers, the Anderson clan of Father Knows Best, and Ozzie and Har-

riet and their tribe were the reigning video families of that time; and families are the most identifiable groups of people in household ghost fiction, be they the real-life Lutzes, the Freelings, or the Zorbas. Husband Cy, wife Hilda, teenaged daughter Medea, and ten-year old son Buck were the Zorbas, cast in the situation of being related to a researcher into the occult whose house opened up to them a whole new world understood only by Buck. Zorba is a name we associate with the lusty Anthony Quinn character or Ben Casey's wizened mentor. Why, you may wonder, does it belong to an ethnically contrary white-bread family whose daughter is christened with the melancholy label of the tragic Greek heroine?

The surname of the Zorbas was consistent with the first name of Cy's uncle Plato. The name Plato was almost a divine calling for his career synched with an aspect of the interests of the real Plato. Ancient history's Plato founded the theory of Platonism—belief in an "other world." The center of a concept, he felt, justifies its own existence by resisting outside interpretation, with the eye seeing less than the mind. Firmly convinced of immortality and spiritual rebirth, Plato thought our knowledge is not consciously digested wisdom but faint gleams of recollection from old incarnations of sum total awareness. The precepts of what came to be called Platonism were Dialectics, Physics, and Ethics. Two of these—communication and energy—jibe with the mathematics of Plato Zorba's field, Parapsychology.

With this picture, Castle redirected his penchant for the visual to a gimmick process that stayed within the screen, requiring an uncomplicated complementary device to enhance it. Plato Zorba's preoccupation with seeing ghosts resulted in his development of special infrared like ghost glasses resembling souped-up 3-D specs, only heavier and metallic. Castle had deployed conventional 3-D in his 1953 Columbia feature Fort Ti, one of so many films with nothing behind its special cinematography but plain program material. 13 Ghosts was a film where one of the various off-shoots of Three-Dimension provided direct linkage between the audience and the characters. When it was time for them to adopt their visual aid, it was our cue to follow with a less spectacular version.



Top: No longer having a head to lose, Shadrack, the lion-tamer, is able to "stump" the lion as it reflexively gnaws at the former space of its master's devoured noodle; Bottom: The ghosts of Mrs. Emilio and her lover proving lust exists even after death!

"Illusion-O" called for the distribution of "Ghost Viewers" made of paper with red and blue plastic eyepieces. Unlike ordinary 3-D spectacles, they were needed only intermittently. Without the glasses, the ghost imaging was only marginally detectable. Thus to protect television sales where the film would be seen years after the initial fanfare. The red lenses revealed the ghosts. Blue removed them. Human nature, of course, saw everyone seeing red. Before any ghost appeared, the screen was bathed in a pale glow, signifying anticipation like the crimson Fear Flasher—one half of the fright alarms in the 1966 Chamber of Horrors—or the scarlet tint in The Tangler.

"Illusion-O" afforded something "Emergo" and "Percepto" didn't—freedom of choice. It wasn't a deliberately rude effect that threw electricity into your ass like a joybuzzing whoopee cushion or dangled above your head an inflatable luminous skeleton that incited slingshot practice. Only certain theaters were equipped for these things. "Ghost-Viewers" were simpler and more comfortable. However, the effects coordinators must have been color blind. Blue was the censor hue—yet that was the color tinted over the ghosts!

Like House on Haunted Hill and The Tangler, 13 Ghosts has a surreal time-displaced opening, as though the contents of a bag of tricks are spilling out willy-nilly. Again the immediate introductory effects are darkness and near-parody poltergeist acoustics. The tableau of infinite black is stained by violent oozing spatters of white paint. A spectral visage is vaguely tattooed into the most voluminous globule. The darkness returns to purity as twelve of the ghosts loom forward and sail past to a resounding series of gongs. They are, in numerical order, 1. Screaming Woman. 2. Clutching Hands. 3. Floating Head. 4. Flaming Skeleton. 5. Emilio. 6. His Wife. 7. Her Lover. 8. Executioner and Head. 9. Hanging Woman. 10. Lion. 11. Tamer. 12. Dr. Zorba, the haunter honcho. Indicated by a shuddery question mark, Thirteen is an unfilled vacancy—the still living ectoplasm elect.

Cyrus Zorba, a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum, lectures on vertebrate prehistoric life while furniture repo men empty his house. On his birthday night, Buck wishes for a new home as eerie wind caresses the rustled curtains of an open window. Someone knocks and a creepy messenger brings Cy an urgent telegram, then disappears as the night swallows him. The telegram is from attorney Benjamin Rush. Opening it gives Buck bad vibes. "Why run away before finding out what's chasing you?" asks Cy. "Well, I read about a man who wanted to find it," answers Buck, "but it ate him."

Rush handled the affairs of Dr. Zorba, who had been living secretly in seclusion before his recent death. As he left no money, his house is the bulk of the estate. However Cy is bequeathed a strangely wrapped package. Zorba collected ghosts. "You'll inherit them too", Ben tells Cy and Hilda, who scoff. "They go with the house," he insists. Hilda gets an ominous feeling from the package as the wind blows again. It contains the ghost glasses. When a buzzing fly lands upon them, it is electrocuted.

The Zorbas move into the house, inheriting also Zorba's weird housekeeper, Elaine Zacharides, whom Buck considers a witch. Ben comes over, joining Medea near a portrait of the once-distinguished looking Zorba, whom Ben is convinced was murdered by the ghosts for the horribly mutilated condition of his body. Buck finds a ouija board, activating the fireplace mantle device that reveals a hidden compartment with the planchette and a white book written in old Latin. The board confirms the ghosts. Medea asks if they will do any harm. Buck asks the planchette without touching it if anyone will die. Zorba's portrait falls to the floor. The planchette levitates, points at Medea, and drops into her lap. "Don't ask it when", she shudders, "I don't want to know."

A codicil in the will says the state will take the house if it is not used. In Cy and Hilda's bedroom, flowers in a bowl asphyxiate. Moaning sounds lure Cy to a door. Behind it is a panel that opens to Zorba's lab by itself. A voice whispers "thir-teen...thir-teen..." when Cy puts on the ghost glasses. The number appears on the front cover of the book and is burned in. Against an expansive bare wall, several ghosts appear. Bursting into flames, they merge into a phantasmagorical kaleidoscopic fan of whirling energy that attacks Cy, then recedes and disappears. Thirteen is no longer on the book cover. A searing sensation grips Cy as it is burned onto his hand.

Cy turns the book over to his boss Van Allen, who knows Latin. He has learned from a university publication that Zorba wanted to photo-



13 GHOSTS, William Castle's first family shocker. Pictured are the Zorbas: husband Cy, wife Hilda, daughter Medea, & son Buck.

graph ghosts, capturing them in such places as an Irish castle and the catacombs beneath Rome. If visible, he thought, they could be controlled to some extent. The twelfth ghost, Zorba, promises to be avenged. Summoned home, Cy sees Hilda's kitchen being violently disrupted by the ghosts of Emilio, an Italian chef, his wife and her lover. Emilio's cleaver almost hits Cy. Buck nonchalantly explains who they are. A medium, Elaine had assisted Zorba in his experiments until he turned against her. Toward the last, he converted all his assets into cash and hid them. Elaine and Ben spent weeks trying to find the money.

Elaine shows Cy Zorba's room and the canopied four-poster bed where he mysteriously suffocated. When Cy remains, the lights of a candleabra dim. One candle floats from its holder to the base of the bed, revealing a device before returning to its place. The device lowers the canopy. It rises but goes down again as Cy leaves. Later that evening, a horrible intruder skulks through the house. Awakened by the wind banging against a shutter, Medea goes to close it and recoils from the apparition. At the door, she is blocked by Elaine, who inspects an empty room.

As usual, Buck descends the stairs by sliding down the bannister railing. Behind his back, some money flutters onto the rug. Putting on the ghost glasses, Buck enters the basement, finding a trunk with the effects of a lion tamer, Shadrack The Great. He raises the rusty, cobwebbed door of the lion's cage. It issues roars, then the ghostly lion menaces Buck until headless whip-cracking Shadrack appears, subduing the beast. Ben enters unannounced, and when Buck shows him the money, he asks Buck to keep the money their "secret".

At the museum, Ben tells Cy he can get the state to pay him, saying he never actually took possession of the house. Buck calls Cy to mention the "secret" without actually divulging it. This worries Ben. Van Allen has read the book, Zorba's diary. The last entry tells of the money. Cy decides to postpone the family's move until he can arrange a seance to contact Zorba's secret.

Excluded from the seance because of the late hour, Buck is waiting for Ben to come over. When Cy, Hilda, Medea and Elaine join hands at the parlor table, Elaine invokes Zorba. The ghost glasses permit Cy

to see him emerge from the portrait. Buck discovers all the money, hidden under the stairs, and shows Ben, who says they should retain their "secret" until tomorrow as a surprise. He encourages Buck to turn in immediately. Possessed by Zorba, Cy intones "Thirteen... death tonight...one of you." Zorba disappears. Cy asks Elaine to return him, but there is interference. The ghosts are restless and angry.

After Buck has gone to sleep, Ben sneaks into his room and carries him to Zorba's bed. Mist blows in through a ventilation screen, congealing into the shape of Zorba. Buck wakes up in time to escape the descending canopy, but Zorba holds down terrified Ben as it crushes him.

All the money is counted. Ben murdered Zorba and tried to scare the family away. Elaine assures Medea that the ghosts are gone. "You really are a witch, aren't you?" Buck asks Elaine. "Ask me no questions," she retorts testily, "and I'll tell you no lies." "And the ghosts?" wonders Buck. "They'll be back," foresees Elaine. "they'll be back." "Real soon I hope," beams Buck. The ghost glasses rise from their box and explode into fine powder. With her incriminating broom, Elaine sweeps it up. As we take leave of the Zorba mansion, the ghosts make a precessionary goodbye appearance. Fleeting, the specter of Ben Rush appears in his contorted death pose.

Robb White's fourth for William Castle, the script of 13 Ghosts was a better organized draft than the hip-shooting grue revue that was his scenario for House on Haunted Hill. Too much in that film was like someone in a white sheet jumping out from behind a bush or tree just to yell "Boo!" Even though the poison-apple trick or treating of Annabelle Loren and her lover, Dr. David Trent, was designed at scaring one person, Nora Manning, into "killing" Frederic Loren; these effects were often too randomly circumstanced, and the ceiling blood, with a thing for upsetting Ruth Bridgers, was an unnecessary sidetrack. The ghosts of Watson Pritchard's hallucinations were like acquired souls that the house itself maneuvered to collect, and if that was the case, they were an aggregation of spirits with one intent—not the self absorbed phantoms upon the Zorba premises.

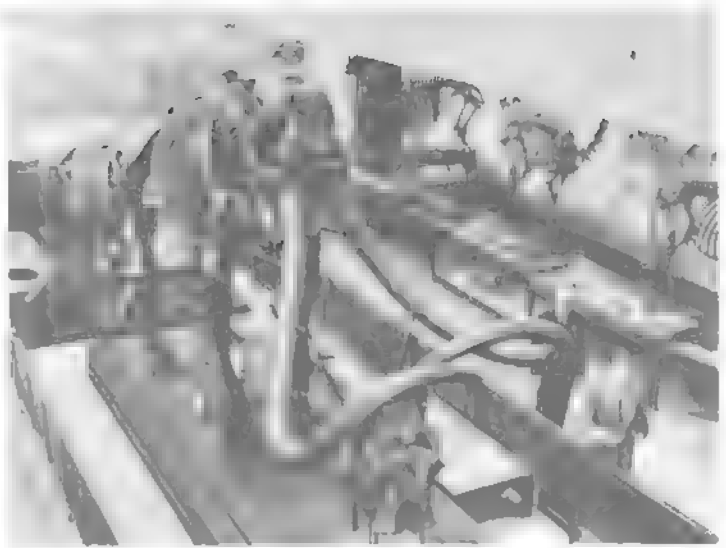
In 13 Ghosts, most everything was a master plan of predestination, helped not slightly by Zorba. It started with the title. The stigmatic number of bad luck thirteen is also the number of most witch covens, although the one "live" witch, Elaine, is benevolent despite her off-putting chilliness. Zorba may have had a premonition of death, not knowing how to prevent it. To protect his money, he relocated it within the walls of his sovereign domain. Once involuntarily removed from livingkind, Zorba could gain as a spirit not only equality with the ghosts but mental superiority over them. Once the killer paid, he would be the "unlucky" Thirteenth Ghost.. his damning number bringing them to a dramatically appropriate average.

Because Zorba left family, they were the only people other than loyal retainer Elaine who could expedite tactics that required the

After a seance, the ghost viewer worn by Cy (Donald Woods) allows him to see the ghost of Zorba emerge from his portrait.







Above: As innocent Medea, awakened by the wind, rises to close the shutter, she is horrified by an other-worldly apparition; Above Right: Cy's work place: contrasting dinosaurs, extinct monsters of reality, with ghosts, fabled monsters of abstraction; Below Right: The clean-cut Ben (Martin Milner) discusses bones with expert Cy. Milner, as it turns out, is the greedy murderer.

living. Since Zorba's intelligence reached outside his domicile, it may have touched its smallest conduit, Buck, making their shared interest appear hereditary. Zorba may have choreographed the family's need to find new lodging certain that necessity would bring them to his place. Their involvement starts when Buck's wish for a new home is timed to the telegram. The ghost glasses, treated at first like the contents of Pandora's Box, attend the inheritance because they are a tool that could allow the Zorbas to meet the ghosts when the ghosts wanted to appear. Once installed, the family is discriminately jerked around so Zorba can enlighten them to the crime committed against him.

Elaine, of course, is the spirit guide. At one time psychics and other paranormals had been labeled witches. Elaine moves in the shadows of two worlds that blend in juncture in this house. She had been comforted by Zorba's overseership of the ghosts. When that immunity dissipated, the ghosts accepted her for her tie to Zorba. Elaine is clairvoyant and witchy and Buck has her pegged out of conjecture that is as much sentiment as intuition. Buck is useful to the unraveling of certain clues. The ouija board chooses him to be its discoverer, and the moving planchette responds to his word. As adults, Cy and Elaine are subjected to the heavier, more physically and mentally taxing symptoms of ghost activity. Cy is first to be informed of the meaning of thirteen and is the most frequent wearer of the ghost glasses.

Only the ghosts who get to Cy behave as deputies of Zorba. The rest are into their own particular bags...oblivious, it would seem, to their transplantation to California. Unsolved problems, Zorba thought, are why Earth binds so many spirits. An overused catch-all presumption, but regardless of how we face death, most of us would like to shuffle off this mortal coil with tidy books. Life, according to spiritualism, leaves its own stamp on Existence After through certain perpetuated life drives—often the definition of ourselves—and the retention of our corporeal condition at the time of demise. If we leave a glamorous stiff, fine, if not an unpresentable one will shrink our appearance options unless the appearance is put to a practical application.

Zorba had been canopied-pressed into looking like the Phantom of the Opera under Teenage Frankenstein makeup. His malformation is overly melodramatic, but it does suggest that he died through murder most foul. Shadrack had gambled his life on how often he could look down the throat of the lion and hear only the roaring of applause afterwards. For no longer having a head to lose, Shadrack is able to "stump" the lion as it reflexively gnaws at the former space of its master's devoured noodle. Shadrack and friend definitely adhere to the greasepaint saw that the show must go on. The lion keeps his defiance, but as Shadrack is also dead, he is out of the danger that

retired him on Earth. Emilio is a parody of the stereotyped Impossible Chef—often a short-fused foreigner. A collection of odds and ends, he is an apron, a chef's hat, sleeved arms, a cleaver, and a curly white mustache that matches the color of his other particulars. Zorba, Shadrack and Emilio are the "personality" spooks, personifying revenge, bravery and petulance.

The sin of Mrs. Emilio and her lover, the Floating Head, the Hanging Woman, and the Skeleton are like homages to House on Haunted Hill—especially the noose-suspended female, who recalls Annabelle in her ghost guise appearance, while the skeleton could either be her or Dr. Trent after the acid bath. The flames? Maybe the fires of hell.

Buck and Elaine are both lonely and become guardedly familiar with each other. Ben treats Buck as a buddy, but we know what his reasons are. Buck's impertinence only implies the veiled truth about Elaine, and though her centigrade reading goes up slightly, she can always reassert her bark. Buck is so wishfully predisposed to believing in ghosts they must appreciate him for it. How else did he get the poop on cranky Emilio through an unmentioned grapevine? Making Buck overly precocious would have detracted from his innocence as a ghost groupie. When Medea says she had seen an apparition, Buck naively asks, "Apparitions? We got those too?" And the meanings of the ouija game and seance have to be explained to him.

Zorba hoarded his money not only to trap Ben but to leave his kin an additional legacy. The dollar bills that Buck discovers are like paper good tooth fairy gifts, part of the ensnaring cheese. The knowledge that Buck shares with him becomes Ben's greatest liability, and for the way Ben plans to dispose of him, Buck is rendered bait for the final and just use of Ben's murder device. Once Zorba has fully resolved his problems, the ghosts can freely return to their



Medea, after her confrontation with the apparition, confronts housekeeper Elaine (Margaret Hamilton), who blocks her entrance, destroying the glasses so no rain can dampen their parade ever.

After 13 Ghosts has played itself out, one tends to apply the clinical skepticism that saw through the weaknesses of House on Haunted Hill. Most of the inconsistencies here center on Ben. We can buy the way he killed Zorba except for where he could steal the time to rig the canopy inasmuch as beds are our most-used pieces of furniture. The planchette stunt had to be a Zorba manifestation, yet it targeted Medea, the only person Ben himself scared. A warning from Zorba? Since Ben witnessed the occurrence, he should have realized there were forces not in his charade, and despite the money involved, gone back to chasing ambulances. But avarice has made men sell their souls to the devil. Zorba was a very formal dresser, yet the Ben bogey, styled to resemble him posthumously, wears dusty work shoes and torn jeans with sticky cobwebbing between the trouser legs. Since this spook obviates ghost-viewing, it must be a fraud. Endeavoring to kill Buck while he is in lullabyland, Ben forgoes the rest of his disguise but wears the ghost pants.

The Union Card ghosts were a combination of special props, made-up actors, and a very real lion. Shadrack was a professional animal trainer dressed in a false-shouldered uniform that kept the dimensions of what real bodies are supposed to look like. Other headless living (or unliving) men on film often resemble top-heavy upper torsos pumped full of steroids because less effort is taken to conceal the actual people within. Whether whole-bodied or segmented, the ghosts registered in high-contrast white with the overlay of blue tinting for more distinct superimposition. Where there was nothing around the white portions or where detail etchings had been made, the backgrounds would show through.

House on Haunted Hill had used space and uncluttered darkness to create foreboding interiors, as did parts of 13 Ghosts. Space at least was quite abundant in the museum, which did more than establish Cy's slightly unusual job. The humungous mastodon and toeradactyl skeletons are the leavings of flesh and blood "monsters" who lacked permanence but left enough of themselves to record their species for posterity. Extinct creatures of fact are one scale of relativity between beings of mythic proportion: one type, dinosaurs, a historical reality; the other, ghosts, fabled abstraction. Every working



Ten-year-old son Buck (Charles Herbert), not afraid of ghosts, contacts the spirit world via his ouija board.

day Cy lives with the remnants of things that were no more unnatural than whales or sharks or squids but would frighten us if we met them as they had originally been.

Confiscation of the furniture in the Zorba's first home established their financial embarrassment and also set the stage for the beginning of a strange adventure as their barren living room took on the appearance of an isolated shelter warmed only by the love of its familial inhabitants on a happy occasion for one of them. The most livable parts of the Zorba mansion were cozier and more plush than the Haunted Hill house. Inspired maybe by its stark wine cellar, the scariest places are also lightly dressed sets. The wall where the lab ghosts materialized was a long flat expanse that seemed designed for a tableau. Other than the bed and the candleabra, Zorba's boudoir is fit for a deathwatch cell. Its only small aperture, the vent, is placed to resemble those windows in state guest accommodations that face the gallows.

Castle's last two films had a box-office name in Vincent Price. Margaret Hamilton was an institution for proving that no one else in the world could have played the Wicked Witch in The Wizard of Oz and be good enough to inspire tangent roles that would seek her out. She wasn't, however, someone who could carry an entire movie alone and was billed sixth. Charles Herbert was the only persona child actor of fifties horror, usually the youngster in a family with its father turned into a monster. One film, The Fly, saw aspects of itself recreated in 13 Ghosts, namely the destruction of a fly and the flesh-flattening bed canopy. Herbert had a sprightly inquisitiveness that developed into an appealing personality only when he neared his teens, then his career stopped.

Donald Woods was credible as the objective Cy because a smooth-running inner equilibrium was at the heart of most of his characterizations. He was like Hugh Marlowe with suggestions of a more vital actor under all the chronic reassurance. The bushy tailed youthfulness of Martin Milner was beneficial to how well Ben hid the amoral sleaze under his earnest, concerned exterior. Rosemary De Camp was reasonably selected to be the mother figure, although Hilda was not a woman of much fortitude and something of a wet blanket.

Jo Morrow was there to provide the jeopardy reactions of a pretty young woman and did well enough as Medea. Van Allen was the always sleekly debonair John Van Dreelen, whose rolling cultivated vowels dignify anything he says.

William Castle often turned to the Famous Monsters trade to support his movies, although he never allowed his own children to see them when they were young. During the premiere of 13 Ghosts, PM set up a fan club for him, recruiting prospective members from its readers. The country was going to elect a new president in 1960. Castle "ran for office" via ghost-costumed placard-carriers who endorsed him as they traveled by float to where he was scheduled to appear. The mock campaign promised to make the Thirteen Ghosts his Cabinet. Maybe Castle should have won the election. With this kind of administration, we might have avoided the Bay of Pigs. Emilio would have most certainly kept any sexual improprieties out of the, er, Fright House.

# FORGOTTEN FACES OF FANTASTIC FILMS

by Jim Coughlin

CESARE GRAVINA [1858 - 19 ?]

Cesare Gravina was an expressive Italian actor, whose skillful portrayals of both villainous and sympathetic parts enhanced many popular silent films. His excursions into the realm of fantasy included The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Phantom of the Opera, and The Man Who Laughs.

Born in Naples, Italy, in 1858, Gravina's career took many turns before leading him to the American cinema. Gravina, married to an opera singer, was a conductor at La Scala in Milan for several years. He was considered an expert player of Venetian gentlemen in Goldoni comedies, according to Thomas Quinn Curtiss' fine biography, Von Stroheim. For a while, Gravina served as personal secretary to Enrico Caruso, as well.

Gravina made some films in Italy, including Fricot e le Uova (1914). He headed his own theatrical company which played the leading cities of Europe, Central and South America. When the troupe disbanded during World War I, Gravina journeyed to the United States and eventually accepted offers to appear in motion pictures. The Mysterious Client (1918), starring Irene Castle, was one of his first American film appearances.

Gravina is probably best remembered for his performances in the films of Erich von Stroheim. In Foolish Wives (1922), he was Caesare Ventuoci, the avenging counterfeiter, who unceremoniously murders von Stroheim and drops his body in a sewer. His substantial role of Zerkow, the old junkman who obsessively dreams of riches, comprised the major subplot of Greed (1925). Virtually all his scenes, however, felt the censor's axe when the film was taken out of von Stroheim's hands and reduced from 42 to 10 reels. Extant stills and the original script of Greed attest to the intended importance of Gravina's portrayal. Gravina had benevolent roles of a similar nature in two other von Stroheim films as the puppeteer father of

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS (Universal 1927): Ursus (Cesare Gravina) and blind Dea (Mary Philbin) are rejoined by Gwynplaine (C. Veidt).



Mary Philbin in Merry-Go-Round (1923) and the father of Fay Wray in The Wedding March (1928).

Cesare Gravina also won acclaim for his sympathetic work opposite major child star Jackie Coogan. Gravina was the kindly sidewalk musician who befriends Coogan in Daddy (1923) and Luigi the Clown in Circus Days (1923). Other prime motion pictures roles came in Madame X (1920), starring Pauline Frederick; Beach of Dreams (1921), as Professor Epnard; The Humming Bird (1924), as Charlot; Butterfly (1924), as Von Mandescheid; Contraband (1925), as Pee Wee Bangs; The Magic Garden (1927), as the Maestro; and as Gigi in The Divine Woman (1928), starring Greta Garbo.

Among the many Universal films in which Gravina appeared were two Lon Chaney, Sr. classics, The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923) and The Phantom of the Opera (1925). The latter featured Gravina as the retiring manager of the opera house, beneath which Erik the Phantom resides. The manager can barely hide his delight as the deal is closed to sell the opera house. Gravina taunts the new owners about the presence of the "phantom."

Gravina's best fantasy role was that of Ursus in Paul Leni's The Man Who Laughs (1927). The New York Times termed his performance as the carnival medicine man and philosopher "excellent." His touching portrayal complemented that of the stylized Conrad Veidt, who was Gwynplaine, the intentionally disfigured youth who becomes first a famous clown and then the heir to a peerage. Ursus, along with the beautiful and blind Dea (Mary Philbin), is banished from England, while Gwynplaine becomes involved in political intrigue. Gwynplaine eventually renounces his title, defies the evil Josiana (Olga Baclanova), and rejoins Ursus and Dea as they are boarding a ship to go into exile.

Gravina's last film in the U.S. was a Hoot Gibson western, Burning the Wind (1929). In it, Gravina played Don Ramon Valdes, the father of Maria (Virginia Brown Faire), who hopes to unite his daughter in wedlock with the son (Gibson) of an old friend (Robert Homans). Boris Karloff had a featured role in Burning the Wind as Pug Doran, who turns Maria's staged kidnapping into the real thing.

With the advent of sound, Gravina decided to abandon his career in motion pictures and return to Italy. Now in his early seventies, Gravina settled into retirement in Naples, circa 1930.

Details and circumstances of his death are unknown.

FERN EMMETT [1894 - 1946]

Fern Emmett was a fine comedienne with a dead-pan countenance, who was usually able to rise above the low-budget independent or "B" pictures she was typically cast in as a gossip, a hillbilly, a chamber maid, a school teacher, or the town eccentric. It was in the latter role that she contributed to FRC's quickie, Dead Men Walk. Rather than having a learned scientist like Professor Van Helsing trying to convince the principals that "vampires do exist," the script provided for a spinster half-a-step from the county sanitarium to be the resident expert on the undead. Emmett also performed in fantasy genre films like The Vampire Bat, All That Money Can Buy, and Pillow of Death.

Born in Oakland, California in 1894 (some sources say 1896), Fern Emmett became enamored of the stage at an early age. She had a dour,



lean look that allowed her to play older character parts when most women her age were enacting ingenues. Emmett played in various touring and regional companies, particularly in California and the southwest, eventually heading her own comedy troupe for a time.

Emmett did some film extra work in the late silent period, but her first billed appearances came in a number of independent westerns in 1930: Ridin' Law and Romance of the West (as the landlady), both starring Jack Perrin; Bar L Ranch and Westward Bound (as Emma), with Buffalo Bill, Jr.; and The Land of Missing Men (as Martha Evans), starring Bob Steele. She was also seen as the maid in Second Honey-moon (1930). Emmett appeared in some shorts in the early thirties, including Bridge Wives and Anybody's Goat (both 1932).

As Gertrude in The Vampire Bat (1933), Emmett is viewed caring for the dying Martha (Rita Calisile) as Dr. von Niemann (Lionel Atwill) performs his examination. The doctor discusses medication with Gertrude, as Herman (Dwight Frye) slips into the room to see Martha. Gertrude tries to quiet Herman and takes a cross from him to put at Martha's bedside. She then tells von Niemann of the attack on Martha by "a giant bat." This helps the doctor to prey on the villagers' fears and set poor Herman up as the fall-guy for a series of local murders.

Emmett continued to appear in minor films, such as Monogram's City Limits (1934); Mascot's Behind Green Lights (1935); and Melody Trail (1935), starring Gene Autry. Her first role in a major film was that of Lina, one of the Tolliver clan, in The Trail of the Lonesome Pine

**DEAD MEN WALK (PRC 1943):** Top: The eccentric Kate (Fern Emmett) is quizzed by the minister (Sam Flint). This scene was cut from the final print; Bottom: Old Kate (Fern Emmett) discovers the resting place of the undead Elwyn Clayton.

(1936). Emmett was a farm woman in The Harvester (1936), Aunt Elsie in Dangerous Holiday (1937), and was seen with the Three Mesquiteers in Come On, Cowboys (1937).

Thanks to cable television programming, such as USA's "Night Flight," viewers are once again being treated to the campy exploitation films of the 1930s, such as Assassin of Youth (1937). As Henrietta Friable, Fern Emmett had a prominent role in this minor cult favorite warning against the dangers of marijuana. Ms. Friable is the town gossip who delights in spreading the misfortunes of others to anyone who will listen, as she rides about town on her motor scooter (somewhat predating Margaret Hamilton—an actress to whom Emmett bore more than a fleeting resemblance—on her bicycle early on in The Wizard of Oz). She attempts to disparage the good name of Joan (Luana Walters), a prospective heiress, in court. In what must have been an in-joke, it is revealed that Henrietta and the judge (Henry Roquemore) years before had an affair. Roquemore was Emmett's real-life husband. The two had a home in Beverly Hills in the 30s and 40s, as they both struggled to find feature roles, but Roquemore never even obtained the minor notoriety that Emmett did.

Fern Emmett had two great loves other than acting—cats and gardening. She fancied herself as a feline expert and would take in stray cats, training them to perform sophisticated tricks. Emmett was also proud of her dahlias, which she raised from seeds.

Emmett was seen as a Hindu woman in The Rains Came (1939), starring Tyrone Power. She was in Scattergood Baines (1941), with Guy Kibbee in the title role, and at least two other entries in this RKO series, Scattergood Pulls the Strings (1941), and Cinderella Swings It (1943). Other appearances for Emmett came in Six-Gun Gold (1941), with Tim Holt; Broadway (1942), with The Invisible Woman star, Virginia Bruce. All That Money Can Buy (1941)—aka The Devil and Daniel Webster—provided Emmett with another fantasy genre role as the wife of Robert Emmett Keane.

Dead Men Walk (1943), a PRC "quickie" featuring George Zucco and Dwight Frye, represented Emmett's most important horror film appearance. As Old Kate, Fern is first viewed trying to tell the sheriff (Hal Price) and Dr. Lloyd Clayton (Zucco) how a victim died, but the sheriff threatens to send her "away." Kate counters that Dr. Clayton's supposedly dead brother's evil is "growing stronger every day." When Gayle (Mary Carlisle) is recuperating from the attack of the vampire Elwyn Clayton (also Zucco), Kate enters and gives her a cross, stating, "I'm the only one who can save you." Kate gives a discourse on vampires, which Lloyd overhears. She tells the doctor to find Elwyn's body and destroy it with fire. Later on, Kate follows Elwyn's servant Zolarr (Frye) to an abandoned cemetery and discovers the resting place of the vampire. Before she can alert Lloyd, however, she is discovered by Zolarr and murdered. Emmett played Kate in an off-centered manner, but it was a nice piece of acting, especially when compared to the general production values of Dead Men Walk.

Emmett went on to play Mrs. Callope in San Diego, I Love You (1944), with Jon Hall, and appeared in Can't Help Singing (1944), starring Deanna Durbin, and A Song to Remember (1945), with Paul Muni and Cornel Wilde. Emmett portrayed Madame Lambert in the latter. Fern's last billed screen appearance (as Mrs. Williams) was in Universal's Pillow of Death (1945), starring Lon Chaney, Jr. All her scenes were cut from the final release print, but Emmett's name remained in the credits.

Fern Emmett died in Hollywood, California on September 3, 1946. She easily falls into the category of "forgotten faces," but existent films such as Dead Men Walk and Assassin of Youth display her comic flair and attest to her talents being far greater than the material she had to work with.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

by Gary J. Svehla

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**HORROR HOLOCAUST** by Chas. Balun. 96 pages, trade paperback, \$9.95.

Chas. Balun, who poses on the final page of this book bare-chested with two machetes slightly cutting into his breast (of course it's "reel," not "real"!), is perhaps the most knowledgeable and talented writer of ultra-gore horror cinema. His fanzine, *Deep Red*, and his capsule-review book, *The Gore Score*, only hint at the talent to be found within these 96 chock-full-of-splatter photo pages.

Balun is obviously intelligent and formulates innovative ways of looking at the merits of today's modern horror films. His writing style is both clever and folksy (an obvious attempt to not appear too intellectual) and conversational. Often his analytical criticism is gushing with enthusiasm compelling the reader to agree immediately with all his views. But his writing style is very convincing and

generally well supported. He utilizes facts and figures to embellish his reviews (his coverage of *I Spit On Your Grave* includes the reasons given by the writer/director why he approached his subject matter in the way he did, based upon personal experience rescuing a rape victim). In other words, Balun knows his territory well, writes passionately, informatively, and humorously.

Thematically, his chapters include: "Of Head Cheese and Chainsaws," "Lucio Fulci and the Scourge of the Cannibal Zombies," "The Importance of Being *Re-Animator*," and "FutureGore," plus two more chapters. For anyone not understanding the merits of "splatter" cinema, Balun goes a long way to defend its merits (with wit to boot). My only regret was that it is only 96 pages long. I hope a volume II is in the offing.

**THE ZOMBIES THAT ATE PITTSBURGH: THE FILMS OF GEORGE A. ROMERO** by Paul R. Gagne. 237 pages, trade paperback, \$14.95.

This is a superb, essential book for all serious horror genre buffs. With so much already written on the films of George Romero, what new material could be added? Paul Gagne via sensitive analysis of the films themselves (tracing two themes: the conflict between magic and reality, and the blurring of the distinction between monster and victim), interviews with Romero himself as well as members of the production team, and the revelation of pages of new information about these often discussed films make this perhaps the finest record yet on the modern horror film. Besides being definitive as far as the cinema of Romero is concerned, the volume is even more essential as a documentation of the problems of being an independent filmmaker working within the confines of budget, the compromised production of *Day of the Dead*, the MPAA Ratings Board wide distribution via the major studios once Romero gives up creative control vs. limited release while maintaining complete artistic control, and living the impossible dual role of being a good businessman as well as being an unfettered, creative artist.

Gagne reveals many surprises as revealed by the candid Romero. For once the original plot of *Day of the Dead* is described and the complete reasons are given why that movie was never filmed as planned. Also, Romero reveals his original ending for *Dawn of the Dead* and why he lightened up and filmed a more up-beat ending. Romero also states which of his own productions are his favorites and why. And Romero, in total candor, explains whether or not he considered the character of Martin to have been an actual vampire or not.

As can be seen, this book is not for the casual horror movie fan. It is a factual, detailed, personal look into the life of one of the most instrumental people making horror movies today. This is one of the most essential books on genre cinema published this or any year.

**THE NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET COMPANION** by Jeffrey Cooper. 120 pages, trade paperback, \$10.95.

An inconsequential addition to any film library, this "Official Guide" appears to have been rush released to coincide with the then unreleased *A Nightmare on Elm Street III: The Dream Warriors*. The book itself has merit: plenty of photos, a nice color middle section, interviews with Wes Craven and others, in-depth analyses of



the makeup/special effects, etc. But too much space is wasted on retreading well-worn plot synopses and restating the obvious. The print is large size, and photos dominate the layout. The book has "let's make a buck" written all over it.

Still, if one is a fan of the *Nightmare/Fred Krueger* series, perhaps 11 bucks is not too high a price to pay.

**RE/SEARCH #10: INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILMS** by V. Vale, Andrea Juno, et. al. 224 pages, trade paperback, \$14.95.

Another truly amazing collection of interviews, essays, fantastic quotes, and historic genre surveys making this book actually resemble an over-sized magazine. It is the perfect companion piece to *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia*, being totally dedicated to the various genres of schlock and exploitation movies. What makes this volume the better reference work is the fact that *Psychotronic* offers little more than opinions. *Incredibly Strange Films* offers the best interviews I ever read with directors such as Frank Henelotter (*Basketcase*), Herschell Gordon Lewis (*Blood Feast*), Ray Dennis Steckler (*Incredibly Strange Creatures*), Ted V. Mikels (*The Corpse Grinders*), and Larry Cohen (*It's Alive*), among others. In fact, the interview section—so intimate yet so informative and involving—occupies the entire first half of the book.

The second section of the book offers concise, fact-filled genre articles which historically define the evolution of the genre in question: biker films, J.D. films, women in prison films, LSD films, beach party films, Ed Wood, Jr. films, etc.

The third section, and least satisfying section, contains genre essays that appear to have been severely edited because of space limitations. They are good in what they hunt at. Too bad they happen to be so brief.

The remainder of the book consists of a directory of important genre personalities, favorite "bad" quotes from schlock movies (one of my personal favorite sections), favorite recommended film lists, etc.

In this era of glamorizing "trash" cinema, the editors and writers here must have worked overtime to produce the most profound and in-depth research source yet available on schlock/exploitation cinema. The layout and photos are appealing, yet in this case it is the written word that excites me the most about this book. The information contained within is indispensable. This is a must-have.

**THE PSYCHOTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM** by Michael Weldon. 815 pages, trade paperback, \$16.95.

"Selective movie watching can improve your life. Take someone to a movie tonight," so suggests editor/writer Michael Weldon at the end of his encyclopedia of "psychotronic" (weird horror films merged with gadget-filled sci-fi films is what the title suggests) films. Weldon's book is a loving review of exploitation films: biker movies, rock 'n' roll movies, musclemen movies, 3-D movies, horror movies, science fiction movies, etc. The format of the book is to list films alphabetically including the most important credits: producer, director, screenwriter, release date, alternate titles, studio, etc. Following comes a combined synopsis/critique, most of which are fairly brief yet clever and to the point.

The importance of this volume is not as a research source, for many other books have done this aspect better. But the key purpose of *Psychotronic* is to provide entertainment and fun. This is a specialized capsule-review source: an ode to schlock, exploitation, and lovable bad movies. Therefore, the critical approach is one of informality, humor, and favorite sequences recalled to remember just how bad the movie really is. Of course some respectable films are included: the Quatermass films, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Invaders from Mars*, etc. But Weldon's heart and sympathy lies with those horrible films we love to groan over.

Weldon's volume contains little that already hasn't been said, but the sheer scope of the package, its tacky layout, and again, its sense of fun make this a true joy to thumb through. Considering the amount of pages, the price is very fair. This is the ultimate book for movie fans whose idea of film criticism rejects the scholarly/academic and instead is symbolized by the "scan" button on the VCR and is summed up by the phrase, "Please pass the popcorn!!"



**THE PENGUIN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL** Edited by Jack Sullivan. 482 pages, cloth, \$29.95.

An ambitious idea that bites off a little more than it can chew, *Encyclopedia* limits itself to the study of horror and the supernatural (not merely in film, but in the areas of music, literature, comics, etc.). This reference volume is structurally divided into three categories: author entries (writers, artists, directors, actors, composers, etc.), individual film entries by title, and theme essays.

It is certainly a little unsettling and humorous to see author Franz Kafka followed by actor Boris Karloff followed by poet John Keats. Thematically, horror is a very thin thread to hold these three personalities together. Similarly, Hammer Films is followed by the movie *The Hands of Orlac* which precedes British author Thomas Hardy.

Often, the opinions of one author contradict another. For instance, Cronenberg's *The Brood* is dismissed as being "flawed" while the very detailed and interesting article on David Cronenberg refers to *The Brood* as being his first "masterpiece."

The opinions of the varied staff of writers sometime rehash the tried and true (the essays on Hammer Films, Bela Lugosi, and Zombies offer little that already hasn't been stated many times before) but often essays offer startling food for thought. The essays detailing "B" Movies, David Cronenberg, *The Pits of Horror* (the most ridiculous "B" movies), etc. are fresh and interesting to read. One critic reveals that the library sequence from *Horror of Dracula* whereby Dracula and his enraged vampire mate fight over possession of Jonathan Harker reveals the bisexual nature of vampirism. Another critic suggests that the *Beast From Haunted Cave*, a quickie programmer, contains a creature that is "perhaps the nearest thing to a Lovecraftian monster the cinema has seen." Radical statements such as these abound every so often.

*The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* is a very ambitious work. It is better to be read and judged piecemeal than as a whole entity. Some of it is informative, some of it entertains, some of it rehashes the obvious, and some of it is stimulating. For the price, a nice deal (yet flawed).



THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE DIRECTLY FROM THE PUBLISHER. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT BUYERS INCLUDE AT LEAST \$1.50 EXTRA FOR POSTAGE.

**THE OUTER LIMITS: THE OFFICIAL COMPANION** by David J. Schow and Jeffrey Frentzen. 406 pages, digest-size, paper. \$8.95 from Ace Science Fiction Books, The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Simply put, this is the Outer Limits TV series what Marc Scott Zicree's similar book was to The Twilight Zone series. This is an essential volume to add to any film fan's library. I dare say it is the final word on this pivotal science fiction television series.

Besides including the basics: each episode fully documented with complete cast, credits, original broadcast date, synopsis, and production details, this book excels because of its interesting inter-chapters. For instance, profiles appear on the following (to name but a few!): Leslie Stevens, Daystar Productions, Joseph Stefano, Byron Haskin, the Production Crew, the Story Factory, Project Unlimited (the monster-making crew), the Voices from the Outer Limits (the narrators and voices of the monsters), etc. Titles and synopses on unfilmed scripts appear. Besides the usual still illustrations, the volume includes rare clearance documents from Harlan Ellison's personal files, story-boards, original art, original network ads, etc.

In other words, the research, time, and effort which went into the production of this book were several years in the making. In no way is this a quick, commercial cash-in. Instead, the term "labor of love" and definitive volume come immediately into my head. So much rare information is seldom found in any single book. Pick this one up!

**DARK ROMANCE: SEXUALITY IN THE HORROR FILM** by David J. Hogan. 352 pages, digest-size, cloth. \$29.95 from McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640 (telephone: 919-246-4460).

This book explores sexuality in only the broadest sense (no pun intended!). For instance, in the second chapter, "The Horror of Duality," which deals primarily with Jekyll-Hyde movies, the author soon explores Jack the Ripper movies and drifts into a major discussion of Time After Time. Whenever a film features a man and a woman, sexuality is involved. But the chapter deals with Jerry Lewis' The Nutty Professor, Universal's The Wolf Man, Taxi Driver, etc. While these movies might have a secondary sexual motif at best, the movies are often explored for their own intrinsic value rather than as a critical study of their thematic sexuality.

I loved this volume because the chapters themselves remind me of the type of film criticism that can be found in these very pages. But writer David J. Hogan seems to be employing the context of a sexual criticism of the horror film genre only in the most general sense. In fact, so many movies are mentioned that it is difficult for Hogan to include any in-depth analyses. For instance, in his chapter "Lugosi, Lee, and the Vampire Lovers," the Hammer series is almost superficially dismissed. For me one of the most sexually dominated vampire films is Don Sharp's Kiss of the Vampire. And this film receives far less coverage than Taste the Blood of Dracula, a nondescript entry at best.

As I said, I really enjoyed Hogan's interesting appraisal of the horror film genre, but the discussion is far too general to be allowed the label: "Sexuality in the Horror Film." Far too much of the obvious is here rehashed, and little in the area of original sexual analysis appears.

As an overall analysis of the genre I would give this book a solid thumbs up. But as a specific analysis of sexuality in the genre, I was slightly disappointed. Once again, the text is always interesting and thought-provoking.

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## EDITORIAL (Continued from page 3)

available, as well as the premiere of a new horror/comic book. Hope to see many of you there next September 10-11.

Of course as far as distribution of copies goes, we cannot hope to compete with FantaCo. But Midnight Marquee does have a steady crew of subscribers who buy directly from us, and we cannot disappoint these dedicated readers. Therefore, people ordering their Anniversary issue of MidMar from us will receive a special bonus. First of all, I would be delighted to autograph each copy ordered from us [send signing instructions with your order]. Also, a member of our talented art staff will design a special anniversary issue limited-edition commemorative drawing which will be personally autographed by both the artist and me. This commemorative drawing will be available only in copies ordered directly from us, and the print run will be limited to only around 200-250 copies maximum. In other words, the early bird gets the worm. When they're gone, they're gone.

Subscribers who already paid \$3.50 for issue #37 in advance may deduct this money when ordering copies of the special Anniversary issue. Or, you may request that this money be used for the following year's regular-sized issue, issue #38, to be available during the fall of 1989. A letter will be enclosed in all subscription copies explaining the options. In any matter, the giant 208 page issue of the zine will bear the cover price of \$14.95 [plus \$1.50 for book rate shipping or \$3.00 for first-class mailing when ordered from us]. Whether you buy directly from us, from FantaCo, or from your favorite shop, that's just fine. The important thing is not to allow this special edition to slip through your fingers, for it will be our absolute best issue ever!

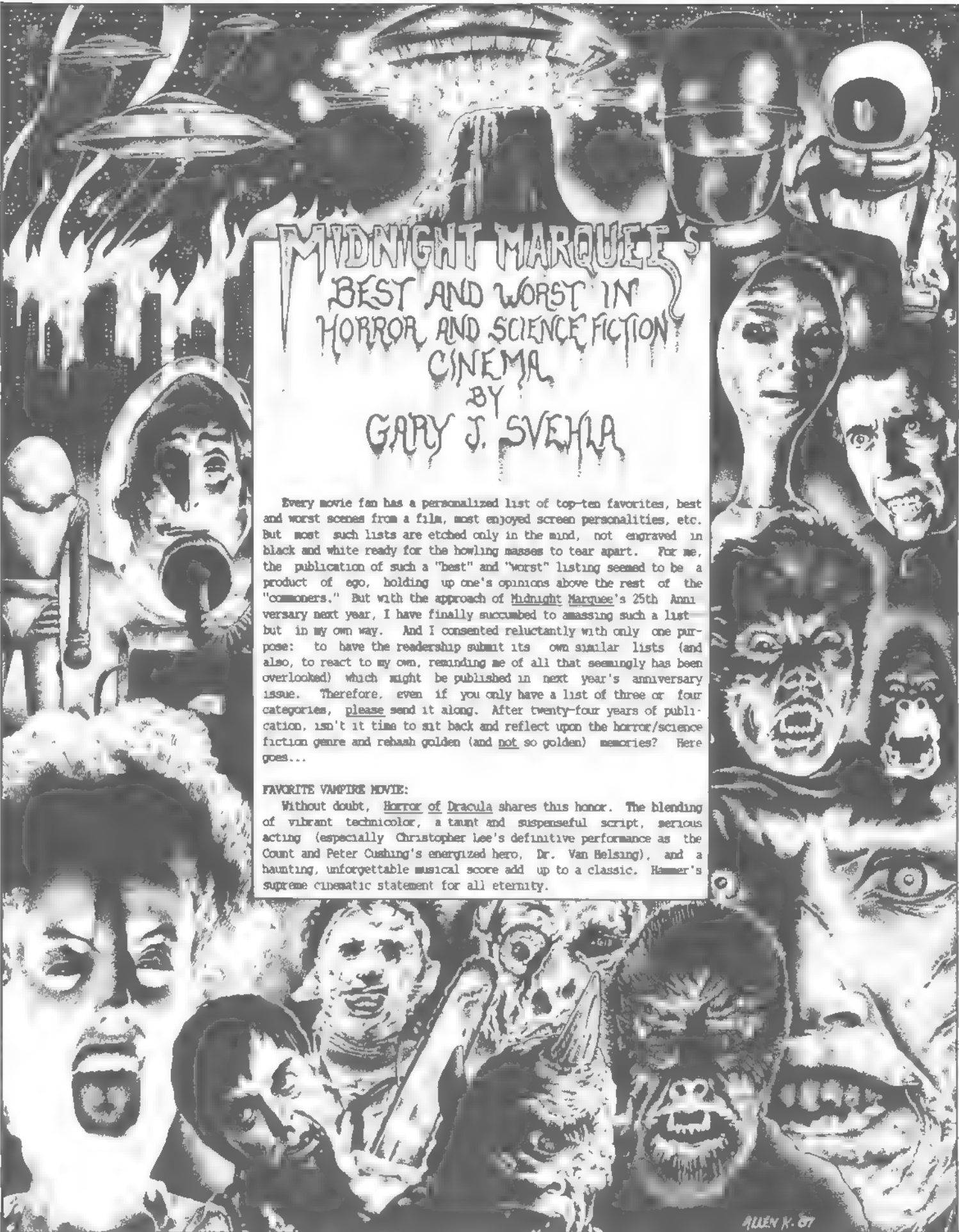
Thus far here are a few things that have already been lined up. I am contacting contributors (artists and writers alike) both past and present to write brief reflections of what the world of fandom/fanzines means/meant to them, as well as remembering what working for Gore Creatures/Midnight Marquee means/meant to them. As stated earlier, Bill Nelson will be designing a glossy full-color front cover, and we will feature a second "front cover" on the back to be designed by Allen Koszowski. Two covers for the price of one!

Raymond Young is working on a compiling a definitive list of every fantasy film fanzine ever published, as well as submitting his 10-years-in-the-making article on "Soviet Science Fiction Films." Dennis Fischer will be submitting his thorough piece on the films of Dario Argento. There will be a special, expanded edition of Jim Coughlin's "Forgotten Faces of Fantastic Films." John R. Duvoli will continue the second installment of producer Richard Gordon remembrances, this time dealing with The Haunted Strangler and Corridors of Blood emphasizing the producer's relationship with Boris Karloff. Celebrities are being asked to reflect on what horror films and/or fandom means to them. Director John Carpenter has already responded. So too will Forrest J Ackerman who has agreed to contribute a reflection focusing on Famous Monsters, and Bob Stewart (and perhaps Calvin Beck) has agreed to reflect upon his years working for Castle of Frankenstein. A host of other celebrities may also be contributing if their schedules allow. Also, for the first time since the Gore Creatures days, artists will be allowed to design 4-5 page portfolios highlighting a topic relating to some specific area of horror/science fiction cinema. And I could go on and on. But this is only the beginning. 208 pages presents us with the opportunity of a lifetime, and we plan to take full advantage.

For now enjoy our regular issue (I believe it's a good one!), but look forward to receiving your special 25th Anniversary issue next September. And remember FANTACON in Albany next September 10-11.

Larry J. Svehla

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# MIDNIGHT MARQUEE'S BEST AND WORST IN HORROR AND SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA BY GARY J. SVEHLA

Every movie fan has a personalized list of top-ten favorites, best and worst scenes from a film, most enjoyed screen personalities, etc. But most such lists are etched only in the mind, not engraved in black and white ready for the howling masses to tear apart. For me, the publication of such a "best" and "worst" listing seemed to be a product of ego, holding up one's opinions above the rest of the "commoners." But with the approach of *Midnight Marquee's* 25th Anniversary next year, I have finally succumbed to amassing such a list—but in my own way. And I consented reluctantly with only one purpose: to have the readership submit its own similar lists (and also, to react to my own, reminding me of all that seemingly has been overlooked) which might be published in next year's anniversary issue. Therefore, even if you only have a list of three or four categories, please send it along. After twenty-four years of publication, isn't it time to sit back and reflect upon the horror/science fiction genre and rehash golden (and not so golden) memories? Here goes...

## FAVORITE VAMPIRE MOVIE:

Without doubt, *Horror of Dracula* shares this honor. The blending of vibrant technicolor, a taunt and suspenseful script, serious acting (especially Christopher Lee's definitive performance as the Count and Peter Cushing's energized hero, Dr. Van Helsing), and a haunting, unforgettable musical score add up to a classic. Hammer's supreme cinematic statement for all eternity.



#### FAVORITE SEQUENCE FROM A VAMPIRE MOVIE:

Christopher Lee's snarling, full-fanged entrance into the gothic library in Horror of Dracula as unwary Jonathan Harker, seduced by the beauty of Dracula's vampire-mate, is about to be bitten. Just as the mistress' fangs are ready to penetrate Harker's neck, Count Dracula, eyes blood red with authority, claims the human prey for himself as the two vampires, aggressively prepared to do combat, circle and lunge toward each other. The chemistry and energy emitted here is overpowering.

Runner-up: Bela Lugosi's theatrical yet other-worldly introduction of himself to unmoved real estate representative Jonathan Harker (Dwight Frye) during the initial castle sequence from the original Universal Dracula. This obsessed performance is perhaps the best quarter-hour Lugosi ever performed on screen.

#### FAVORITE VAMPIRE DESTRUCTION SEQUENCE:

The battle to the death between Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee from, once again, 1958's Horror of Dracula. Cushing's marvelous hand-to-hand battling combined with Lee's dominant stance yet increasing fear as the dawn's rays approach culminate in Dracula's graphic disintegration to dust as Cushing rips the heavy drapes off their mountings allowing the sunlight to eat away the flesh of the dreaded Count. Still very effective and considered very graphic for its time.

#### MOST ANEMIC PORTRAYAL OF A VAMPIRE IN FILM:

Alex D'Arcy from Blood of Dracula's Castle. I don't find fault with the lame low-budget production itself (although it is quite bad) as much as I find fault with the mocking interpretation of the distinguished king of the vampires as enacted by slithery, over-the-top D'Arcy.

#### FAVORITE FRANKENSTEIN MOVIE:

Without doubt, James Whale's 1935 production of Bride of Frankenstein, so atypical of what the myth of Frankenstein's monster became, still generates a fairy tale locate in which to feature the blackest of horror film humor. Boris Karloff's performance as the Monster is the shining moment of his career and also one of the classic performances, bar none, from the history of the movies. Never has the dead seemed so human.

Runner-up: Hammer's Revenge of Frankenstein. Even though the monster degenerated into the stereotype of what we think every Frankenstein's monster becomes (that is, a crippled, defective, salivating, murdering fiend), the classic reinventing of this old chestnut by deemphasizing the importance of the monster by stressing the character of the monster-creator was risky and paid off for Hammer. Baron Frankenstein became Peter Cushing's most distinguished character performance, one he was to repeat in a slew of Hammer Frankenstein films.



#### FAVORITE CREATION SEQUENCE FROM A FRANKENSTEIN MOVIE:

The gloomy castle watch-tower, with its high stone walls and ceilings, reflecting the bright flashes of lightning as the kites fly overhead, from Bride of Frankenstein. Never has a creation sequence obtained these stark results.

Runner-up: Hammer's Universal-inspired creation sequence (in glorious full-color!) from the mediocre Evil of Frankenstein. Even if the movie falters, its creation sequence with its brightly flashing electrical circuitry, its ascent into the heavens, and the ear-piercing clashes and booms produced one of the most dramatic creation sequences since Bride of Frankenstein.

#### MOST UNHUMANITY EVER PORTRAYED AS THE FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER:

A difficult choice because there are so many nauseating performances, and when you compare them to Karloff's performance, they appear even worse! But I would have to credit Gary Conway whose performance in I Was A Teenage Frankenstein was all makeup without a hint of humanity or pathos. The success of the film led to all the other horrid Frankenstein performances: Frankenstein's Daughter, Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster, Frankenstein Conquers the World, etc. Conway was the first "personality" to portray the Frankenstein monster according to popular stereotype: as an unthinking, unfeeling, zombie-monster who lives to kill.

#### FAVORITE WEREWOLF MOVIE:

Joe Dante's The Howling is the finest werewolf movie to ever grace the haunted screen. Even though it is low-budget and graphically violent, it still holds reverend the classic Universal movie mythos and infests the screen with fascinating werewolf lore never before seen in a werewolf movie. Instead of allowing improved makeup technology to control the movie, the sensational makeup and conception of the werewolves, their amazing transformations, are just one means to achieving the ends: a nightmarish blending of horror and satire which pays tribute to the past as it blasts into the future never looking back.

Runners-up: Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman always fascinated me more than Universal's original Lon Chaney Jr. vehicle, The Wolf Man, for The Wolf Man is played so seriously, lacking a sense of fun, while Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman never attempts to be anything but fun. Even though this film has received more of a critical blasting than almost any other major Universal horror chiller, it still stands up as an energetic, fast-paced horror fairy-tale.

Universal's often forgotten gem, Werewolf of London, produced in 1936, five years before the such heralded The Wolf Man, is the outstanding serious Universal werewolf film. The script is entertaining; the performances are exceptional (especially Warner Oland's performance as the sinister doctor and Henry Hull's performance as the doctor/werewolf).

#### MOST OVER-THE-TOP PORTRAYAL OF A WEREWOLF:

Lon Chaney Jr., never much of an actor (his two exceptional



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PRESENTS A ROBERT WISE PRODUCTION



AT HILL HOUSE...THE DEAD  
DON'T STAY QUIET!

Who do they want? who will  
satisfy them? who can  
soothe the half-mad sob  
the eerie giggle,  
the soundless  
screams?

JULIE HARRIS • CLAUDE RAINS • JAMES CAGNEY • JANE FARRAR • JOHN HODGINS • JOHN L. HODGINS • JOHN L. HODGINS • JOHN L. HODGINS

performances are in *Of Mice and Men* and *High Noon*), demonstrates all his excesses and flaws with his depiction of Lawrence Talbot from *The Wolf Man*. Chaney generates little energy, little sympathy, and his acting is stilted throughout. His makeup, animal lurches, and animalistic stances are fine, but this is not a performance. Any well trained stunt actor could do as well.

Runner-up: Michael Landon's performance from the oft-mentioned *I Was A Teenage Werewolf*. True, this happens to be one of the best schlock fifties' exploitation horror movies; it really is a good time. Yet Landon's performance, adequate at best, never warrants all the accolades it has garnered over the past thirty years. Just because his career later mushroomed does not mean that his one "sleazy" performance should be singled out.

#### BEST ZOMBIE/LIVING DEAD MOVIE:

George Romero's *Day of the Dead*, in my mind the best of his zombie trilogy, is the ultimate thoughtful modern splatter film. It fails to hold up under meticulous critical dissection, has flaws in the acting and other departments, but it never fails to deliver the goods: fast-paced horror and grisly thrills. This movie is like the peerless "fast-food" restaurant: it must be appreciated for what it is and it should not be compared to other more legitimate products. Who said there was anything wrong with producing the most superlative hamburger in the world? Sometimes I would rather have burgers instead of lobster or steak!

Runners-up: George Romero's initial, crude *Night of the Living Dead* gets the nod here not so much for what the first "zombie" movie presented cinematically (for Romero surpassed this pioneering exercise in exploitation cinema twice), but simply for the fact that this one movie influenced the creation of a sub-genre which rules the modern horror film market, even today. *Night of the Living Dead*, like it or not, is a watershed film.

*Carnival of Souls*, a film which influenced George Romero to create *Night of the Living Dead*, shines as a haunting, episodic low-budget classic. Unfortunately the acting is sometimes less than adequate, the pacing is too slow in parts, but when *Carnival of Souls* is spooky, it is truly scary.

*The Walking Dead* is a neglected 1936 Warners' horror opus starring Boris Karloff as a small-time criminal unfairly framed and put to death in the electric chair. Karloff's performance as the lethargic walking-dead zombie killer is excellent as usual. I believe it to be one of Karloff's most sympathetic performances ever.

*The Evil Dead*, like Romero's *Day of the Dead*, is excellent for what it attempts: to scare the living daylight out of its audience. The plot can be considered ridiculous, the acting is adequate at best, and even the makeup effects are sometimes ineffective. But the sheer energy of Sam Raimi's direction and the film's cinematography carry the audience to new heights of terror.

THE 13 GREATEST SHOCKS OF ALL TIME!

Consult your doctor! Bring your seat belts!  
See if you can handle someone with warm hands!

"Blood drips from the ceilings,  
bodyless heads talk and the dead walk!  
IF YOU HAVE A WEAK HEART WATCH OUT!"

—LOUIE L. PARSONS



#### MOST OVER-RATED ZOMBIE/LIVING DEAD MOVIE:

Val Lewton's *I Walked With A Zombie*, while it contains some nice visuals and mood, is too dreadfully dull to be considered classic horror cinema. It is respectable, artistic, and its direction, by Jacques Tourneur, is sometimes inspired. Mood and cinematography might be enough for some, but for me, this is one of the most over-rated horror classics ever.

*White Zombie*, another boring mood piece, presents some of the most ridiculous performances ever to grace a horror film. Bela Lugosi's starring performance, while it does stumble under its own weight, is still grandiose and fun. But the leading hero and heroine, character performances, red-herrings, etc. are absolutely dreadful. Pathetic!

#### FAVORITE SUPERNATURAL/GHOST MOVIE:

Robert Wise's *The Haunting* is one of scariest horror films to ever grace the motion picture screen. Even when viewed today this movie never fails to send shivers down the spines of audiences. And to this film's credit, no apparitions nor ectoplasmic creatures are ever depicted on screen. Instead, sensitive performances, astute photography, gripping direction, and moody set design create the horror. Even though I praise some modern splatter movies whose ability to terrify is through buckets of blood and makeup, there is no comparison here when such subtlety can evoke the same response: overwhelming terror.

Runners-up: *The Legend of Hell House*, directly influenced by Wise's *The Haunting*, is very spooky in its own right. Again, subtlety creates the horror with atmospheric storms, long walks down dank corridors, spooky nightmares, and corpses quietly rotting away in hidden rooms. While *Hell House* lacks some of the mystification of the earlier Robert Wise film, it does manage to chill the blood.

William Castle's *House on Haunted Hill* is the type of ghost story that audiences hate—simply because the ghosts are logically explained away at the end. However, even though Castle's film seems more a homage to 1940's "B" noir, *House on Haunted Hill* is effectively scary as the mood of apprehension constantly builds. One or two classic scares occur, and all these goings on never fail to entertain.

*Poltergeist* effectively presents what these earlier films wisely choose to avoid: concrete depictions and visualizations of the spirit essences that "haunt" residents of the house. Even though *Poltergeist* lacks the craft of Robert Wise's atmospheric horror, producer Steven Spielberg and director Tobe Hooper effectively blend special effects with the classy haunted house ghost story to produce enough scares for all concerned.

#### FAVORITE SCARE SEQUENCE FROM A SUPERNATURAL/GHOST MOVIE:

Even though not one ghost is ever depicted, the sequence where Julie Harris and Claire Bloom clutch each other in their bedroom as a ghostly boom pounds at their locked door as they cower in fear is

terrifying to behold. The Haunting is a text book film to demonstrate the lost art of creating chills and scares without blood or special effects.

Runners-up: In William Castle's always entertaining House on Haunted Hill there is a sequence in which the heroine is investigating a darkened room pounding on the walls looking for secret openings. Suddenly, the terrifying vision of a white-haired hag suddenly appears, arms out-stretched, her face grimaced, as the younger woman turns about. One of the best scares ever in the annals of horror cinema.

The appearance of several ectoplasmic monsters as Heather O'Rourke is kidnaped by these beings from "the other side" from Hooper's Poltergeist. This sequence is the lesser of all the sequences mentioned here, but it is still dandily handled and does manage to terrify as well as fascinate the movie viewer.

#### FAVORITE MOVIE MONSTER OF ALL TIME:

Even if the aliens were a little over-exposed in the sequel, the masterfully conceived alien creature from Alien and Aliens gets my pick as the ultimate monster, not simply because of the non-humanoid design by artist H.R. Giger, but because of the masterful way in which the alien was teasingly hidden from the audience's eye throughout both movies. For once an alien "monster" that looked totally non-human was used so effectively to generate chills and fear.

Runners-up: King Kong from King Kong. Never has a mechanically animated monster seemed so real, so living, and so sympathetic.

The Cyclops from Ray Harryhausen's Seventh Voyage of Sinbad. It is hard to isolate any one of Harryhausen's incredible monsters but they lifted stop-motion animation to new heights of artistic expression, any and all of them.

The wonder-world of Rob Bottin's alien shape-changer from John Carpenter The Thing. Never has an alien monster distorted the human form as effectively as Bottin did here. His monster makeup effects set the standard for the current generation, and his effects for The Thing have never been equaled, let alone surpassed.

Any of Rob Bottin's wonderfully carnivorous werewolves from Joe Dante's The Howling. The sequences where humans are transformed into wolves are absolutely breath-taking and surpass Rick Baker's similar sequences from the more-expensive An American Werewolf in London.

#### MOST PATHETIC MOVIE MONSTER OF ALL TIME:

The honors must go to the walking rug monster from The Creeping Terror. It is almost possible to see the men under the rug move the "monster" along.

Runners-up: The giant crab monster from Attack of the Crab Monsters, especially the one quick sequence where it is possible to see the human legs that extend from the underbelly of the crab wearing tennis shoes.

The marvelous (sometimes) transparent brain that floats through the air suspended on visible wire from The Brain From Planet Arous.



The punk-style bird, actually an ineffective puppet, that became the visible terror of The Giant Claw.

The savage monster-alien from Fire Maidens of Outer Space, similar in design and execution to the clumsily constructed alien fiends from Invasion of the Star Creatures.

#### BEST EXOTIC SEQUENCE FROM A HORROR/SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE:

The most imaginative sequence has to be Christopher Stone making passionate love to his secret lover under the full moon as the pair slowly transform into werewolves, from Joe Dante's The Howling.

Runner-up: Nastassia Kinski's nude romp after transforming into a cat creature from Paul Schrader's Cat People.

For its imaginative kinkiness alone, the "rape" of the innocent blonde by the monstrous toad, Beliah, from the climax of Basket Case.

Britt Ekland's nude ritualistic pagan dance sequence from The Wicker Man.

Seductive Panther Woman Kathleen Burke's sensuous come-ons to bewildered hero Richard Arlen, from Island of Lost Souls.

#### BEST SCHLOCK LOW-BUDGET HORROR MOVIE:

Two-way tie for best schlock: Bride of the Monster must be noted for its terrific interplay between Bela Lugosi and Tor Johnson (which gives new meaning to the word pathetic!). Lugosi, recovering from a drug addiction, takes all of this very seriously, which only adds to the camp effect. The ridiculous rubber octopus, the cardboard sets, the over-emphasized atomic explosions, etc. make this one of the most enjoyable bad films ever made.

Co-winner is a personal favorite of mine, The Brain From Planet Arous, in which two giant floating brains one good, one evil vie for the possession of hero/villain John Agar's psyche. The good brain, who hides inside a dog's body, can only help Agar when the evil brain leaves Agar's body for short periods of time. Agar's classic sequence, with dark contact lenses covering his eyes, involves his psychic destruction of an airplane (in actuality, a toy model hanging on wires) as he laughs maniacally. Seldom seen today on TV, Brain from Planet Arous is a genuine schlock classic.

Runners-up: I Was A Teenage Werewolf simply because it initiated the teenage monster sub-genre which prospered during the fifties and today seems like so much fun to remember.

Attack of the Crab Monsters for its ridiculous sense of logic and fun. The giant crab monsters themselves are worth the price of admission.

The Killer Shrews is definitely one of my favorite schlockers simply because the sight of dogs wearing shrew makeup (long rat-like tails, etc.) is so unnerving. Also, the film is tense, scary, and

## WINGED MONSTER FROM 17,000,000 B.C. ATTACKS!



JEFF MORROW MARA CORDAY

almost too good to be considered in this category. One of my all-time guilty pleasures.

The Flesh Eaters, another seldom seen horror programmer, is wonderful for three things: its nasty Nazi villain enacted by aging Martin Kosleck, its well executed slime monsters which are truly terrifying, and for its over-abundance of pre-splatter gore which shocked audiences way back in 1964. Its classic gross-out sequence involves a beatnik who has consumed "flesh eaters" and whose comical personality quickly changes to fear, horror, and agony as the carnivorous parasites eat their way out of the beatnik's stomach—all this seen on camera (though TV prints have been edited).

The Astounding She-Monster is the archetypal 1950's pulp-cover, she-alien from outer space who invades the Earth. This "monster"—dressed for invasion wearing skin-tight glittery costume, spiked heels, and makeup—is too campy to believe. The film, likewise, is pure fun when viewed today.

#### BEST FLYING SAUCER SEQUENCE FROM A SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE:

The arrival of the Mother Ship from Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind as the diminutive, colorful little puffs of light herald its arrival.

Runners-up: The realistic flying saucer army that attacks national landmarks in Washington, D.C., from Harryhausen's Earth Vs. The Flying Saucers.

The marvelous Toho color-comicbook battles from either The Mysterians or Battle in Outer Space. The movies themselves may not be classic, but their flying saucer battle sequences were state-of-the-art for the fifties and sixties.

#### THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE HORROR MOVIE GENRE:

This category goes out to the film that has been unfairly overlooked in the critical accolades department, a film deserving much more credit than it has accumulated.

Because it would again be unfair to have only one winner, I have selected five films that I feel have influenced the history of horror cinema to a substantial degree, but five films who have received little critical respect.

Black Sunday, the first and greatest film of Italian director Mario Bava, is a tribute to the importance of cinematography in the horror film. Black Sunday is one of the most complex and mature vampire movies ever produced.

Horror Hotel is a moody, depressing, and effectively chilling black magic/witchcraft film which stars Christopher Lee. Its young

heroine is murdered one-third through the movie, a gimmick made popular one year later by Alfred Hitchcock in Psycho. Top-notch entertainment!

Dark Intruder, a theatrically released TV pilot starring Leslie Nielsen, runs barely an hour long. Yet its Lon Chaney Sr. inspired demon/monster, its tight script, and its fog-shrouded cinematography make this one of the forgotten gems of the 1960s.

Private Parts, the directorial debut of schlock-satirist Paul Bartel, released by MGM in 1972, was quickly buried once the studio realized what it had released. This is one of most original, perverse journeys into the psychotic mind complete with voyeurism and fetishism running rampant. Yet Bartel's quirky flourishes are anchored by an involving script and excellent performances.

John Carpenter's The Thing, as time separates the classics from the "flashes-in-the-pans," in my opinion, takes on the status of classic horror film. The big-budgeted effects laden opus, a critical and financial disaster when initially released, just gets better with time. Hopefully, someday, this film will receive its due credit as being an imaginative and well-crafted horror gem.

#### THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE GENRE:

Once again, five sci fi movies, exceptional yet critically overlooked, here receive credit long overdue!

Enemy From Space, a long unappreciated low-budget science fiction classic, recently rediscovered on videocassette, is now being seen as an intelligent, gripping, adult science fiction drama, one of the finest films Hammer ever produced.

Man From Planet X is an anomaly from Edgar Ulmer, the man who directed the bizarre The Black Cat for Universal in 1934. Man From Planet X is a science fiction film set in the stereotyped world of the horror movie (with the spacecraft landing in the foggy English moors). Thus, never has a sci-fi film seemed so much like a horror film. Seldom seen today, this is a true conversation piece.

Fiend Without A Face, too long considered as just another science fiction programmer, suffers from slow pacing. But its depiction of flying brain/spinal cord monsters is way ahead of its time as far as credible special effects go.

The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas, created by the same writer and director of Enemy From Space, is another overlooked treasure which harbors another warning for humankind. The monsters turn out to be the noble creatures and humans become the animalistic savages. This film's mood, script, and performances (especially Forrest Tucker's and Peter Cushing's) are all outstanding.

The Crawling Eye features less than perfect special effects of the eye monsters, but the suspenseful story, moody photography, and utter eeriness of the production make it a science fiction stand-out. Once again, the British science fiction film has seemingly never received its due respect.

#### THE MOST OVERRATED/OVER-PRAISED HORROR MOVIES:

Many horror movies receive too much praise and credit, so isn't it about time that these films be put into proper perspective? Here is





my list of four overrated horror productions.

The Exorcist received so much media attention at the time of release with many critics calling this the scariest, sometimes the best horror movie ever made. Respectable and expensive, but The Exorcist is principally more of an overblown character study than it is an in-depth horror classic. True, it is a "class" act and one worthy of much praise, but it never lived up to all the hype thrust upon it.

Rosemary's Baby was another major critical success when released initially in the sixties, but when seen today, it seems like an overblown little movie. I always found this movie to be fairly dull and ordinary.

I Walked With A Zombie, considered by many to be Val Lewton's greatest horror movie, is moody, true, but it also is dreary and dull. A classic horror film this is not.

The Wicker Man was praised in many film publications as being one of the most literate horror movies ever made. That's another way of saying it is dull. The movie itself is fine, and its nude dance sequence by Britt Ekland is certainly an erotic highpoint, but classic horror film, one of the best ever produced—come now!

#### MOST OVERRATED/OVER PRAISED SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES:

Once again, four science fiction films that received far more than their fair share of credit are here exposed and brought down a rung.

The Day The Earth Stood Still is good science fiction drama, well acted by all concerned. But how many times can one watch this film before all the lessons are remembered and all the surprises become old-hat? I believe classic movies can be watched and re-watched without boredom overwhelming the film experience. I can watch this film twice in a decade, at most!

Fantastic Voyage was heralded as the most ingenious and expensive science fiction movie ever produced, and when it was released in the sixties the special effects were indeed mind-boggling. But excellent special effects do not make classic movies, and this mediocre sci-fi production sinks under its own weight.

It Came From Outer Space was always cast in the light of prestige science fiction drama, being based upon a story by Ray Bradbury. However, not even the "gimmick" of 3-D could keep this drama exciting. True, it features several splendid sequences and again has a thoughtful moral for humanity. Yet the film is very ordinary and plays its thrills too politely and safely.

Destination Moon, considered to be the first outer space science fiction movie ever produced, photographed in lush technicolor, is one of the dreariest, dullest, and most painful cinematic experiences ever put to film. Its 1950ish vision of a trip to the moon may have delighted audiences in 1950, but I believe that even then audiences were probably bored to tears. George Pal did much better later on in his career.

#### BEST "BLOB" FROM A HORROR/SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE:

The original blob from Yeaworth's 1958 schlock classic, The Blob, is fascinating. This movie is low-budget and amateurish in every area, yet the synthetic monster itself, and the manner in which it is photographed, are always effective. The blob was one of the last innovative screen monsters introduced, and even working within its low-budget restrictions, the blob remains one of the most delightful and fun meteorite menaces ever.

Runners-up: The terrifying Caltiki, The Immortal Monster, too slow-paced for its own good, contains an on-going aura of dread throughout. But its sequences with the slithering monster are very effective and eerily photographed.

Toho's The H-Man, again too leisurely paced for its own good, features some of the most creative blob monsters ever to grace the screen. If the "blobs" were used more often, The H-Man might have been the greatest blob monster movie ever.

#### BEST ANTHOLOGY HORROR/SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE:

There are no winners in this category. Every superior anthology movie contains one or two sequences of brilliance wrapped in between real tripe. Almost always these films feature half-developed story ideas that need to be expanded. These films always disappoint and frustrate me!

Runners-up: 1946's Dead of Night is the best of the pack containing an excellent framing story and perhaps two superior interior stories. But what a movie if one of these tidbits had been properly developed to fill a full 90-minute slot!

Black Sabbath, one of Mario Bava's best movies, contains one truly excellent sequence (the initial one), one good one (the final Boris Karloff vampire story), and one incredibly boring, exploitative one (the "telephone" sequence in the middle).

#### BEST FANTASY FILM GENRE ACTOR/ACTRESS:

ACTOR: Without doubt, Boris Karloff has turned in more superior and varied performances than any other genre actor. Consider his stellar performances: the Frankenstein monster, the grave robber from The Body Snatcher, the decaying In-Ho-Tep from The Mummy, or his oriental villain from The Mask of Fu Manchu, to name but a few. And even when Karloff slumped, his performances were always interesting and refreshing to behold.

Runner up: The intense, always serious Peter Cushing is deserving of recognition. Even if Cushing's performances lacked the versatility of the plum roles accorded Karloff, Cushing always mesmerized the screen with his humanity (Dr. Van Helsing) or lack of it (Baron Frankenstein).

ACTRESS: Sigourney Weaver, whose performances in both Alien films, as well as her erotic possession performance in Ghostbusters, must surely take away all the honors here. Too infrequently are scripts written allowing for an involving female genre performance. The fact that Weaver was nominated for an Oscar for her performance in Aliens only reasserts the importance of her contribution to genre films.

Runners-up: Evelyn Ankers first earned the title of "scream queen" during the heyday of 1940s Universal horror programmers whereby she nobly portrayed the archetype Universal heroine.



Raven-entity Barbara Steele, in essentially a limited amount of genre performances, established the icon of woman as devil-incarnate, especially in her dual-performance as both the innocent heroine and the vampire-witch in Bava's Black Sunday. But it must be noted that here her performance is so effective because the script was effectively crafted to allow a female performer the latitude to create an inspiring performance.

#### BEST POSSESSION SEQUENCE FROM A HORROR MOVIE:

Linda Blair's head-turning, pea soup vomiting attention-grabber from The Exorcist. Even if the movie is over-rated, it does contain several classic horror sequences.

#### BEST CHAIN SAW SEQUENCE FROM A HORROR MOVIE:

Leatherface's fondling of heroine Caroline Williams' thighs with the blade of his chain saw, possibly the screen's most unsubtle phallic symbol, from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II. Ridiculous yet gripping. Horrifying yet funny.

#### FAVORITE HORROR/SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES BY DECADE:

##### 1930s:

Bride of Frankenstein: Its stellar interpretation of the living dead by Karloff alone makes this classic cinema, but its fairy tale mood and uniquely black humor reasserts its classic status.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Fredric March's academy-award winning performance, linked to Rouben Mamoulian's inspired direction, added to Karl Struss' magnificent photography, add up to be produce one of the most inspiring horror movies ever conceived.

Island of Lost Souls is both horrifying, erotic, and humorous. Charles Laughton's effeminate performance is always on target, and Kathleen Burke's sensual performance as a newly created human being (formerly being a panther) is marvelous. The outstanding makeup of monster-men surpassed the more recent remake. An outstanding oddity of a horror classic.

The Invisible Man: Another James Whale Universal classic, but once again, the sense of humor blends well with the horror and mood to produce one of the best science fiction films of all time. The atmospheric photography stressing the reaction of the local citizenry to the unwanted "accident" victim in its midst forms the core of this outstanding fantasy thriller.

##### 1940s:

Cat People: In my estimation, the best of the overly-praised Val Lewton low-budget RKO horror classics. With Cat People Lewton demonstrated the importance of mood and lighting in generating horror.

Frankenstein Meets The Wolfman: As stated earlier, this is a flawed film. Yet never has all of the Universal horror film mythos been so well blended together. Unlike Whale's Bride of Frankenstein, the viewer is not getting high-art but just one heck of a good time. This is one of the best "B" programmers the genre has ever produced.

##### 1950s:

The Thing: This is the perfect blending of science fiction and horror, strikingly presented in neo-documentary style by master Howard Hawks featuring over-lapping dialogue and the sense that we, the audience, are actually there as the horror unwinds. One of the scariest and most imaginative thrillers ever made.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Director Don Siegel forever etches the slogan: we have met the enemy, and he is us. A new type of horror/science fiction film, but one that manages to create an overwhelming sense of horror because the "monster" might be your loved one sitting right across from you. Low-budget but brilliantly directed and acted. A paranoid fifties' classic.



Curse of the Demon: One of the most intelligent and involving horror films ever, directed by Val Lewton alumni Jacques Tourneur. The script, always involving, always surprising, features one of the most complex screen villains ever, the almost likable Niall MacGinnis as Dr. Karswell, leader of a devil cult who lives with his caring mother. While the special effects of the monster/demon have often been criticized, I find it to be one of the best classic movie monsters ever. The mood is on edge, the photography is image filled shot in the starkest noir blacks and grays, and the script is absolutely gripping. One of my all-time favorites (and the recently released videocassette restores cut footage never before seen in the originally released version).

Horror of Dracula: The best vampire movie ever produced, and the absolute greatest film produced by Hammer Film Productions. Never has color been utilized this effectively in a horror film. The unsettling imagery of blood, razor-sharp white fangs, pale human flesh, heaving breasts, etc. changed the life of this eight-year-old little boy when he first saw this film upon initial release. My favorite film of all time.

##### 1960s:

Brides of Dracula: While not quite as effective as Horror of Dracula, Brides continues to build upon the Hammer vampire mythos which

emphasizes the erotic appeal of the undead. Once again, Peter Cushing shines as hero vampire-killer, Dr. Van Helsing.

**Carnival of Souls:** Another low-budget gem which is always frightening to me. Best to watch this one alone when its flaws can be easily overcome (generally, the acting on behalf of several performers) and the horror effect is at maximum.

**Night of the Living Dead:** Crude by today's standards, but a film that dared to break the taboos of its age by depicting onscreen carnage to a degree beforehand seldom seen. The film is genuinely involving and scary as well.

**Horror Hotel:** Another "little" picture, but one that ages gracefully with time. While devil cult films such as *Rosemary's Baby* receive all the credit, it is the low-budget entries such as this that really pull off the job of terrifying its audience. Outstanding when considering its budget and resources.

**The Haunting:** As stated earlier, the greatest supernatural movie ever produced, and truly, one of the scariest. Subtle and intelligent without being pretentious and "arty."

#### 1970s:

**Alien:** For my money, the best monster-from-outer-space movie ever produced, and the alien creature itself, the creative design of H.R. Giger, is the most creative monster ever executed on film. *Alien* is also one of the scariest movies ever made, one in which I had to turn from the screen several times when I saw it originally (and I was in my late 20s at the time!). A superb, visual concoction.

**Texas Chain Saw Massacre:** A film that showcases the world of the psycho far more perversely than Alfred Hitchcock ever dared. Novice director Tobe Hooper made the film of his career, a film that hinted at more blood and grue than it actually showed. Not subtle nor very literate, but *Massacre* is primal horror, like your worst nightmare that never ends. Hooper understands what frightens the human psyche, and he dishes it out in nonrelenting doses for almost 90 minutes.

**They Came From Within:** Director/writer David Cronenberg's first assault upon the unwary American movie public presents the concept

that sex is death (well before the advent of AIDS!) as phallic parasites are spread via sexual contact and incubated inside the abdomen of the host victim's body. Very kinky, very outrageous, and very violent—in other words, very Cronenberg. And this remains one of his best films. Very imaginative; very original.

**Dawn of the Dead:** George Romero improved upon the concept of *Night of the Living Dead* by interjecting a disquieting blend of humor and satire to the horror and gore. Perhaps *Dawn* is a little too long with conflicting mood (rancid horror vs. prat falls and humor) disrupting continuity, but it is one of the most imaginative horror films of its decade.

#### 1980s:

**The Thing:** John Carpenter's best film is a claustrophobic look at the enemy within all of us. The film is hampered only by Carpenter's failure to generate audience concern for his ensemble military crew, but the depiction of alien invasion whereby the "monster" literally becomes a duplicate of a human being is unsettling. The shape-changer makeup effects by Rob Bottin are superlative. And the total effect of the production is mind-numbing. What an absolutely terrifying horror film classic!

**The Evil Dead:** Once again, splatter reigns supreme in this energetic low-budget exercise in gripping horror as the long-dead spirits at first possess and then destroy their host's body. Unrelenting at hyper-speed pacing, *The Evil Dead* is the ultimate roller coaster ride. Don't analyze things too closely; just sit back and enjoy!

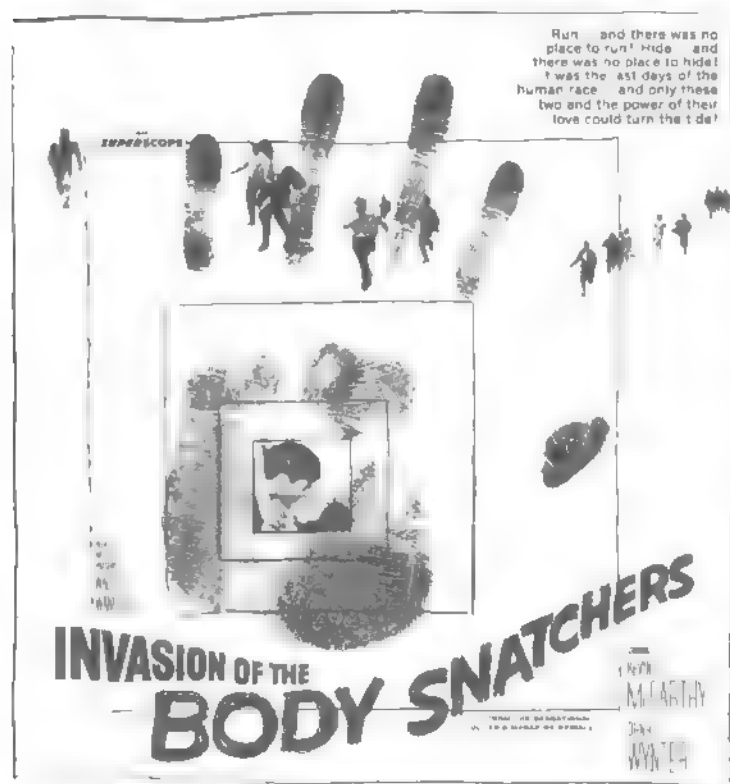
**The Day of the Dead:** George Romero's third (and final?) installment of his zombie trilogy has a philosophy that we may all benefit from concerning mankind losing its humanity as "the dead" learn how to be human all over again. As humanity loses the battle and the zombies win, perhaps Romero is letting us know that the "good guys" are winning after all! Disturbing, violent, and graphic, yet Romero gives his audiences what they want. Well crafted movie-making under all this nausea and gore.

**Videodrome:** Perhaps the most controversial genre piece of the decade, but for me, one of the most intelligent and original horror movies ever produced, conceived within the gifted mind of David Cronenberg. *Videodrome* is laden with gore makeup effects, but its message is subtle, intelligent, and demands that its audience meet the movie-maker half way. For me this film is pure delight.

**Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part II:** Dismissed by critics as being morally degenerate and criticized by horror movie fans as being repetitive and unnecessary, I find this sequel to one of my favorite films to be equally gripping and involving. True, it is disturbing, violent, and perhaps even depraved, but Hooper has managed to tap into the underbelly of the dark side of the human psyche with intelligence, humor, and a clear visual eye. His depiction of hell as a discarded underground amusement park is inspired. Perhaps people should not enjoy *Massacre II* so much as they should be affected by its vision of evil. Perhaps this film is just too disturbing to enjoy.

**Aliens:** Along with *Alien*, this is the best action/science fiction monster movie ever to have been released. Never trying to upstage the earlier *Alien*, *Aliens* instead carries the concept onward and manages to produce a movie that is just as satisfying. Even if the alien monsters are here visible a tad too often, they are by far the best alien monster conception to have ever hit the screen and deserve to be eye-balled. Gripping and scary, but always in a wholesome, clean manner, *Aliens* gives faith to the vitality of the genre in the eighties!

Well, friends, here is my listing of the best and worst! Your reactions, additions, deletions, etc. are appreciated. Help make our 200-page 25th Anniversary issue of *MidMar* an event. The best reactions/similar listings received by January 2, 1988, will be published. Be part of the fun—contribute!





# LINNEA QUIGLEY: CONFESSIONS OF A SCREAM QUEEN

BILL GEORGE

After the demise of Hammer Films the sovereignty of Scream Queens—actresses identified with the horror and fantasy cinemas—faded into insignificance. With the dawn of Friday the 13th and its countless clones women more often contribute to the body count than perform as catalysts for the scary stuff. Thank God that Caroline Munro prevails as the modern generation's premier Scream Queen. Though her cheesecake stills assume a searingly sensuous, near-predatory nature, Caroline's actual disposition is ingratiating and unpretentious. The dichotomy of her reel and real life personalities—respectively, love goddess and a woman who is authentically beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside—has drawn a profusion of devoted fans to her convention appearances; they refer to Captain Kronos, Vampire Hunter, The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, Star Crash, At The Earth's Core, and The Spy Who Loved Me (even though the actress is fifth-billed) as Caroline Munro movies (genre generalizations: horror, science fiction, fantasy are not tolerated).

Aficionados may be hard pressed to identify a screen queen, from the current decade, who is venerated with the same esteem. Among the fledgling candidates is Barbara Crampton; her track record includes Body Double featured in a brief though memorable cameo role, the sublime Re-Animator From Beyond, and next year's Pulse Pounders.

We're eager for Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith, who was glowingly acknowledged in last year's "exploitation edition" of Film Comment, to make a comeback; though closely associated with cult classics and sleepers The Legendary Curse of Lemora and Massacre At Central High among them, we haven't seen her since Video Vixens (1983). How about Frances Raines? She qualified as a contender via a powerhouse performance in Disconnected and her sex appeal impressed even The Mutilator's most severe critics. But she hasn't made a horror film since last year's Breeders (Rainbeaux and Frances...come home!).

Linnea Quigley however, has surfaced as the most eminent of horror heroines. The embryonic stage of her career was launched with supporting roles in Don't Go Near The Park (released to video as Night Stalker), Graduation Day (appearing with Vanna White), The Black Room, Psycho In Texas and the controversial Silent Night, Deadly Night. Her portrayal of "Trash," Return of the Living Dead's punk zombie firmly planted Linnea in the limelight; European posters were adorned with the young lady's unclad torso some variations of the artwork were airbrushed to modestly attire the actress in a vest). Formerly a member of The Skirts, an all-female rock band,

Linnea's "scream queen" popularity has exceeded her recognition as a musician. Readers' response in Fangoria, in addition to positive reviews (including a "rave" from the The L.A. Weekly for Savage Streets), have prompted producers to scramble for Linnea's work; she's topbilled in no less five genre films that are scheduled for fall/winter '87 release, including Creepozoids, The Halloween Party, Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers, The Imp, and Treasure of The Moon Goddess.

Herewith are Linnea's recollections which were recorded during her development as Scream Queen. The roles are environmentally incompatible with her more glamorous stints for Playboy magazine, but the kid is a trooper. Time will tell, but one speculates that her credits may eventually be regarded as "Linnea Quigley movies"; in the meantime, let's hope someone will team-up Linnea with Caroline Munro.

Professional obligations in horror/exploitation films [dealing specifically with the nudity required for many of her roles]: It's not really a big deal. When you're an actress, you really have to have an open mind. So many girls vow they'll never do nude scenes and they never get any work. It's a fact: nudity and exploitation pictures are inseparable. If you're uptight, you'll just give the director a lot of headaches; you've just got to trust the people that you work with. Nevertheless, I have my own limitations, depending on what my character is required to do. I play Treasure of the Moon Goddess for comedy...no disrobenents.

Considering the restrictions of time and money, it can be more difficult to make an exploitation film than a megabuck movie. You may be working with a director who doesn't take the time to help you with your role. You have to watch out for yourself in every department, and that's been part of my education. Sure, you want to act in a major release, but I don't think there's anything wrong with making exploitation films; they brought me money and experience. I did my initial films almost exclusively for the experience. For Summer Camp, my second film, I was paid something like fifty dollars a day; I wasn't exactly thrilled with the movie, to say the least.

I guess I am turning into a bona fide scream queen. Even though Silent Night, Deadly Night caused a stir, which I thought was pretty pointless, the person who cast me in the role also recommended me for Return of the Living Dead. Dan O'Bannon videotaped my audition; I

performed the scene where I fantasize about a death wish...I was even required to dance.

Taking everything into consideration—the late hours, the not-always-exotic locations, the stunts, and hard work—someone asked me, when do you come back to normal? You don't...at least, for a while. You think you'll never get back to normal. While making Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers, my car battery died. I accidentally left the lights on. Leatherface (actor Gunnar Hansen) tried to jump start it. It didn't work. All in a day's work...

Don't Go Near the Park (1981): My first horror film, and a real turkey. I had to throw up before attending the screenings! I played a virgin in a story about cannibals who occupy Griffin Park. The make-up men tried to "age" me with latex in progressive time frames. It played at drive-ins.

Savage Streets: They had already hired an actress to play the blonde girl. Two days before they started shooting, they fired her and got Linda Blair. Everyone was nervous because they thought they may be fired. I was real nervous meeting Linda because, though I was selected to play the part, I didn't look anything like her sister. I don't have brown hair and brown eyes, and I'm short and she's short, and I didn't think I could pass as her little sister. One of the actors was real paranoid about all his performances. He would always call me on the phone, frantically, to rehearse lines...and I played a deaf mute, so it didn't make much sense. So one day he called and asked me to come over there so he could rehearse the scene where I'm in a coma! I told him it would really be more convincing if he waited and saw me enacting the comatose stage on the set; finally, he believed that would be real method acting, so I got my way.

I liked Linda a lot. Production was alternately resumed and then postponed because of finances; we only had a week's shooting to go, and you just want to finish it. You were uncertain if it would ever be finished after working really hard. Everyone waited and waited, and months went by, and finally, we finished it. The rape scene was real intense: it was hard because all of the producers and investors that were never on the set came down that day. The setting was a small, dirty bathroom, so it was real uncomfortable. Most of the

A Belgian poster from RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. Linnea's torso is vest covered. Many posters featured her bare-breasted.



Linnea as "Trash" from RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. Her role required her to perform in the rain and mud with a strep throat.

actors were okay, but they never talked to me so I didn't know what was going through their minds. They were kind of scary, but the other guys were nice. The rape wasn't as embarrassing as it finally appeared on screen. There were a lot of takes, all day long. When the film made its debut it was difficult to look at that scene because it looked so real—especially when that punk kicked me in the face at the end.

Silent Night, Deadly Night (1984): It was dumb. I went to Utah in March or April. It was freezing, and I never saw so much snow. The location was in a real small town and I stayed in a little motel. We were doing night shooting. The first time I got there, I had to practice with the stuntman for some of the things we were going to do. We kept rehearsing it and rehearsing it, lifting me up and lifting me up...I was pretty bruised. This was leading up to the scene where I fight Santa Claus and he impales me on antlers. Of course, the guy playing Santa had a stunt double but not me.

The next night we started filming, and I was real nervous because the first scene was with the guy on the pool table (the lovenaking scene); I don't think he was real happy about it and I wasn't real happy about it, and it was cold. The next thing we did was with this trained cat which I was supposed to let in. Out of the corner of my eye, I kept seeing the trainer strangling the cat to prevent it from missing its cue. The cat was making a choking sound. I wanted to laugh—I couldn't remember what I was supposed to say—because the poor cat was held back. Finally, the cat performed on cue and we did the scene, which I had to perform half-naked, outside where it's snowing, cold...The next night we filmed the scene where Santa hooks me on the antlers (hanging on the wall). They put me up on this brace. It went under my shoulders, and I had to straddle it...pull up on the wall with all my weight. It hurt! Well, the door had to be open—after all, Santa has broken into the house with an axe—and I was freezing. I was up there, half-naked again, on antlers, in pain and constantly shaking. These fake antlers were protruding from my stomach and the technicians were telling me not to move. Because, when I'd move, the antlers would jiggle all over the place. I had to keep hanging up there, playing dead and trying not to jiggle the antlers, while these two guys—Santa and the actor playing my boy friend—were fighting below me!

Return of The Living Dead (1985): The character was far removed from the meek Savage Streets sister, and not even close, at all, to myself in actuality. It may be kind of nice to be like that character, because then you wouldn't have to care about anything. When everyone on the set saw me in make-up, they associated the punk portrayal with my real life self. When they saw me out of the wig and make-up, as myself, they didn't know how to react to me because they just assumed I was a bitch.

It was fun. I liked playing the part ("Trash"), except I didn't like the circumstances involving the rain machine and the zombie make-up and the mud. I kind of passed out; I couldn't walk. I was in the rain, during a two-week shoot, with a strep throat and



exhausted. The night we filmed, without rain, I had to do a bunch of scenes—y'know, like dancing on the tombstone. The smoke was real intense because it just came gushing into my lungs. For my zombie transformation, I had to wear different body prosthetics...people were touching my body, with make-up, all of the time. The mud scene was cold. I was all painted up, and they were burying me! I couldn't breathe, feeling like I was going to drown. I had someone help me back to the trailer after the last scene; Trash was out for the count—drive me home!!! I should clarify that the character was fun to do but the situations she found herself in were not much fun.

Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers (1987): It was fun because Fred Olen Ray did it. He moves real fast and kids around a lot. It was one of the funniest scripts that I've ever read. I got to see the dailies and they were great. I couldn't believe, in the amount of time we shot it, that the movie showed so much on screen. I play a runaway who's real brave and keeps saving the macho detective from trouble. One day was horrible, though, where I had to do this "double chainsaw dance." They painted a snake going all up me; what they thought would take two hours actually took something like six hours to apply. Then I had to do the chainsaw dance, and I'm scared to death of chainsaws. I had to kill people and they kept pouring blood on me, and I had to lift chainsaws to fight with them. I was like lifting weight for eight hours. I was real sore! I kill Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen) with a chainsaw the same way he killed people in Texas Chain Saw Massacre!

Treasure of The Moon Goddess (1987): Two years after we shot our scenes, we had to go to Manila to finish it. It was like making a sequel to the same film. I went to Manila twice, in two months. I thought Manila was going to be beaches and laying out in the sun. It was real different. We had to go through jungles with spitting cobras that could have killed us in minutes, boa constrictors, huge

Lianne [left] from HOLLYWOOD CHAINSAW HOOKERS. Notice her snake tattoo which took 6 hours to apply (instead of 2 hours). Beeee!

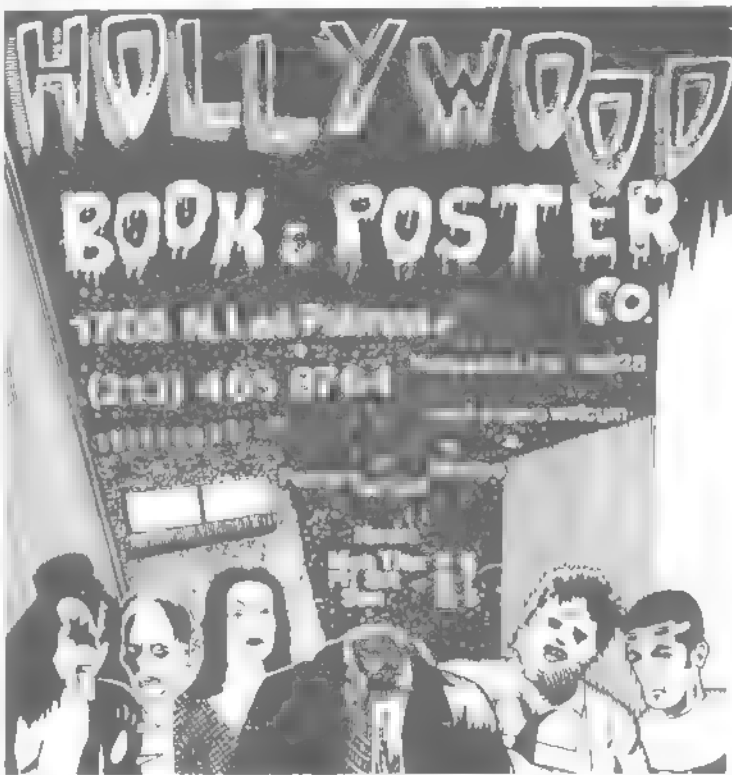


spiders—and I was barefoot! We were up at four in the morning, took an hour and a half to drive to the jungle, and crept through these horrible roads. At the end of one day, we were going to stop filming until we found out that one of the actors wore the wrong wardrobe in all of the scenes. In one sequence, I went to this place—it looked like an Irish pub that was run by dwarfs—looking for my wardrobe box. I reached in, and there were these rats; eight of them in the bag! They were going to use those living rodents as "props"—run 'em in front of me. Manila's streets are lined up with people for sex...brothels everywhere you walk. It's decadent, decadent, decadent. The first part of the film was shot in Mexico.

The Halloween Party (1987): The character is kind of boy crazy and concerned about her make-up. A lot of times, I was in (demon) make-up for 10 or 11 hours, including contacts, which blurred my vision, and teeth. I would have rather been the demon, without that icky make-up, than the girl I played in the beginning (prior to the possession). There's this scene with a tube of lipstick...(you'll have to see the movie to believe it).

Creepozoids (1987): We didn't really have to go through a lot of make-up. We wore military fatigues which were comfortable. My character is a fairly tough marine. The giant rats were fun at times, except when this gooey K-Y jelly was applied to their tongues. A lot of this business was cut, especially the scenes where the rat's huge tongue was assaulting me. They kept putting it in my nose and mouth while I was screaming. Azarrggghhh—kinda like French-kissing a mutant rat.

WANTED: The Editor is looking to trade for the following horror movie posters/lobbies/window cards: the 1947 Universal Reissue one-sheet from DRACULA [I might also be interested in the 32"x28" or 14"x36" as well]; an original lobby card from Universal's 1931 DRACULA [the card must feature a good Lugosi scene]; the title lobby card or the one scene lobby card featuring the bandaged title character from THE INVISIBLE MAN [I am also interested in the Window Card]. I also need major scene lobby cards from a host of classic 1930s Universal horror classics and other studio releases: 1931 DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE, MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM, MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE, THE RAVEN, THE OLD DARK HOUSE, ISLAND OF LOST SOULS, THE INVISIBLE RAY. I have a beautiful original, 1931 FRANKENSTEIN lobby to offer in trade. Write or phone: Gary J. Svehla, 504 Elmwood Road, Baltimore, MD 21206: 301-665-1198 (4 p.m. til 10 p.m. weeknights, any time weekends).





by Gary J. Svehla

\*\*\*\*\* EXCELLENT  
 \*\*\*\* VERY GOOD  
 \*\*\* GOOD  
 \*\* MEDIOCRE  
 \* WORTHLESS

HOMEcoming NIGHT: \*\*\*

This movie, the directorial debut of Fred Dekker, while not totally successful, combines several diverse genres to produce an interesting little horror programmer. Homecoming Night combines the nerdiness of the typical teen romantic "I can't get laid" comedy with the schlockiness of fifties' s.f. a la Corman (in fact, the initial sequence is filmed in black-and-white and is made to resemble a fifties' s.f. "B" film). Thrown into this mix is a modern-day gore-fest featuring the poor man's Brian Dennehy (patterned after the "Dirty Harry" mold of hard-boiled police detectives), Tom Atkins, in the performance of his career. While the young performers do come off as sensitive, it is Atkins' performance which really puts this production into high gear. Just as Bela Lugosi managed to do two generations earlier, Atkins takes mediocre material and creates something superior out of it.

Chiefly for its humor and fairly novel plot, Homecoming Night becomes a superior "B" movie. While it has several serious flaws (the most interesting youth lead is killed off two-thirds through the movie, and the nerdy lead is thrust into being the "hero"), Homecoming Night has a sense of humor and surprise that ultimately makes it succeed.

STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME: \*\*\*\*\*

Sequels, by their very natures, are supposed to become progressively worse as their numbers increase. The Star Trek series is an obvious exception. After surviving the majestic fizzle that was Star Trek: The Motion Picture, Nicholas Meyer's Wrath of Khan was a superb, heart-warming surprise. The characters became more important than the special effects, something Robert Wise never realized when he directed the premier feature. Leonard Nimoy's directorial debut with The Search for Spock, although closer in tone to the original TV series, almost forgot the necessity for good special effects (the sequences on the disintegrating Genesis Planet were embarrassing and reeked of cheaply constructed indoor sets) and his movie suffered for this flaw. True, the characters in Search For Spock were the centerpiece of the film, but somehow, a mostly Spockless Star Trek movie left much to be desired.

Thus, Nimoy's return to helm The Voyage Home was met with nervous anticipation. But fortunately, Nimoy repeated his strengths and improved upon his weaknesses. Star Trek IV is the most satisfying member of the feature film series thus far. Combining a warm sense of humor with interesting character interaction within an intelligent script Nimoy has produced the ideal Star Trek film. When special effects are required, ILM delivers breath-taking sequences of a space craft hovering above a fishing boat, the deadly alien probe approaching a defenseless Earth as viewed from outer space, etc. But Nimoy never allows the visual effects to over-ride the characteriza-

tions. Nimoy even allows minor characters (Sulu, Chekov, McCoy) to have extended episodes, much to the delight of all fans of the series. Too bad Saavik was almost totally neglected.

All in all, Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home is surprisingly effective, intelligent, and fun. It satisfies as it delivers the goods!

THE KINDRED: \*\*\*

Another formula "B" horror movie with a difference! The Kindred, although not based upon a H.P. Lovecraft story, is one of the most Lovecraftian cinema experiences ever. Owing to the fact that special makeup and monster effects have progressed to the degree that now even low-budget projects can afford superior effects, The Kindred does an excellent job of keeping the audience both guessing and on edge as the movie unfolds.

The monsters, seen as shriveled little fetuses in bottles, as probing tentacles that reach from underneath porches and cars, and as glop and goo full-size humanoid fish-men, personify the descriptions that I visualize from the fiction of Lovecraft. True, they are derivative of other monsters from other movies, but their originality comes from the manner in which such monsters are displayed and the visual mood in which they are utilized. Once again, it doesn't take a huge budget to present horror imaginatively.

Co-directors Jeffrey Obrow and Stephen Carpenter, young and unknown, hopefully, will continue to produce genre pieces as exciting and visually impressive as The Kindred. Remember, this is not epic Hollywood talent, but a modest little programmer. And when judged in its own category, the movie really shines!

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS: \*\*

Perhaps people who never saw the original 1960 Roger Corman film version were the ones raving when this movie was released, but for the life of me, I can't see why.

Rick Moranis assumes the role of Seymour, the owner of the blood-sucking plant, Audrey II, from LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS.





Suggestive of Hitchcock, this sequence features Elizabeth McGovern being stalked by psychotic killer Brad Greenquist.

Not to say that Frank Oz' *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* is not entertaining, but ultimately, the film is fluff—it leaves little if any lasting feelings. The songs are clever, the mechanical plant is incredibly realized, and the cameos delivered by Steve Martin and others are highly effective. But somehow the edge, the quirkiness, the off-the-wall humor seems diluted for general audiences here. The entire dumping of the original ending where the plant eats Audrey is now replaced at the last minute by Rick Moranis' miraculous saving of her life, summing up the "play-it-safe-for-the-masses" attitude inherent throughout the production. The innovative merging of the musical and horror genre should be enough to wholeheartedly praise this delightful effort, but somehow the film becomes tedious and the film's effect is only short-lived.

#### THE BEDROOM WINDOW: \*\*\*

Let me admit to my biases up front—I am a sucker for Hitchcock imitations. While others minimize the efforts of director Brian DePalma, I have constantly praised his efforts such as *Sisters*, *Dressed To Kill*, and *Blowout*.

In *The Bedroom Window* upcoming director Curtis Hanson avoids the overblown cinematography of DePalma's work, but in his own unique manner he too is paying homage to Hitchcock. And even though the voyeuristic eavesdropping that occurs around the central image of the film (the title of the film, of course) reminds one of *Rear Window*, and even though the good-hearted Steve Guttenberg is almost destroyed by the authoritarian powers that turn against him (after he at first goes out of way to offer his moralistic help—another recurring Hitchcock theme), *The Bedroom Window* offers enough originality in the suspense/thriller genre to keep the audience on the edge for two hours. Admittedly, Hitchcock did all of this better. But once in a while when the urge strikes to see a Hitchcock derived thriller, thankfully movies such as this exist.

#### DEAD OF WINTER: \*\*\*

A creative cliché best describes this top-notch suspense thriller. Here director Arthur Penn (who has been in a creative slump for over a decade) addresses the noir-ish "B"-film chestnut of the beautiful damsel-in-distress who is being held captive in a creepy gothic mansion against her will. Instead of creating the film as a comic

tongue-in-cheek sendup, director Penn approaches his subject as though he were creating a new genre.

*Dead of Winter* is the first film since Rubrick's *The Shining* that utilizes the setting of a winter's snow storm as something very ominous. Principally a three-character movie (Mary Steenburgen as the hapless victim, Jan Rubes as the crippled villain, and Roddy McDowall as Rubes' psychotic handyman), the movie is visually alive and constantly keeps its audience guessing thanks to the lively cinematography and the sinister dressing of the horror house which becomes almost a fourth character in the scenario (much like Hill House became a character in Robert Wise's *The Haunting*).

Nothing new is added here. The screenplay is conventional yet still manages to surprise. Roddy McDowall is playing the typically off-beat eccentric which he has always portrayed so well. Jan Rubes, formerly known for his portrayal of Santa Claus in *One Magic Christmas*, here becomes the kindly villain whose sinister intentions only emerge near the end of the movie. And Mary Steenburgen recreates the air of vulnerability which she has done many times in the past. However, all these clichés and icons from "B"-movies past become electrified in the hands of the master director Arthur Penn. He has created the ultimate popcorn film of 1987, one that demands that the audience point at the screen, yell warnings to the hero, and hiss at the acts of villainy. The pay-off occurs when the recently mutilated Steenburgen, only seconds before sedated, is startled by the arrival of the police. Steenburgen pleads to be rescued as the fatherly Rubes simply states that the hapless woman is a mental patient of his, that only last night she cut off her own finger.

Manipulating the audience can sometimes be easy, but Arthur Penn utilizes slowly mounting suspense, mood, inventive photography, etc. to create an old-fashioned thriller dressed up in 1980's garb. It's a true gem and a nail-biter to the very end.

#### FROM BEYOND: \*\*\*

Stuart Gordon dazzled the horror film world with the release of his first feature film, *Re-Animator*, one year ago. The blending of low-budget creativity incorporating an involving script, black humor, better-than average acting, and buckets of blood resulted in the equivalent of a fifties' Hammer horror film updated to the eighties (even down to Jeffrey Combs' Peter Cushing inspired ambivalent villain).

The splatter world was eager for the follow-up to *Re-Animator*, Stuart Gordon's five million dollar *From Beyond*, loosely based upon H.P. Lovecraft once again. Unfortunately, Gordon blew both his proverbial wad as well as his creative instincts on this disappointing entry. If *Re-Animator* was similar in tone to Hammer's *Revenge of Frankenstein*, one of Hammer's best, then *From Beyond* most closely resembles Hammer's *Horror Of Frankenstein*, one of the worst Hammer spectacles.

What went wrong? First of all, just as many science fiction epics of the 70s/80s have been accused of being overly dependent upon expensive special effects sacrificing story and character, Stuart Gordon could be found equally guilty of spending the bulk of his budget on gore/makeup/monster effects while sacrificing story, character, and originality. What is wonderful about this movie occurs during the several sequences when the Resonator is turned on thus stimulating the pineal gland which makes a parallel world of monsters visible to humanity and allows humanity to be visible to them. Here Gordon's gruesome homage to the world of Lovecraftian creatures and things that slither in the night does impress. However, these scenes provide the only jolt in an otherwise dreary and slow-paced production. Still worst, the makeup creations and execution of the monsters seem to be based unashamedly upon Rob Bottin's wonderful monster effects from John Carpenter's *The Thing*. And this blatant creative imitation further weakens the overall effect.

Add a sub-plot where the bald Jeffrey Combs becomes an eye-sucking zombie killer, and *From Beyond* becomes downright silly. The acting, including Jeffrey Combs', is pedestrian at best. Combs' character lacks the hitting edge that made his performance so outstanding in *Re-Animator*. Of course the flaw here may be in Gordon's script. Only Ted Sorel is able to amass any persona of monstrous horror, but his role is far too brief (and his character is far too interesting). Barbara Crampton, portraying the clichéd, asexual, totally dedicated

psychologist who is suddenly transformed into a leather-clad "sam" mistress of the whip after one or two exposures to the Reanimator, is interesting more for her kinkiness than for originality of character.

The monsters, though derivative, are interesting as far as monster sequences go, but special effects and splatter do not necessarily create a great movie. Stuart Gordon went head over heels emphasizing gore and grue to the extent that he forgot what exactly made Re-Animator so wonderful a film. Hopefully, Gordon's next release will find this potentially gifted director back on track.

#### WITCHBOARD: \*\*

A derivative horror film that is imbued with just enough energy and creative thrills to make it seem better than what it is—imitative. The lovely Tawny Kitaen becomes the latest victim of a popular 1980's icon: the young innocent seduced by the unknown to the degree that evil ultimately possesses her soul. In this case, Kitaen is fascinated by the youthful spirit of a dead child whom she contacts via the ouija board. The only thing she doesn't understand is that this young boy's spirit is supplanted by the spirit of a mass murderer who pretends to be the little boy in order to at first possess and ultimately control Kitaen.

The story is intensified by having the two male leads both vie for the attention of Kitaen. Initially, one of the males seems dedicated and sensitive while the other comes off as a macho-jerk. Cleverly though, the macho-jerk becomes more sympathetic as the movie develops and his sensitive counterpart becomes potentially cooler and detached. Thus, we have unusually complex characterizations for this ilk of B-movie. Add to this brew one or two odd characterizations, especially a wonderful interpretation of a spiritualist as enacted as a burnt-out sixties' hippie who still exists in her own counter-culture neither world.

The plot, filled with several predictable murders, also features several surprises and twists. Nothing really new here, but this film's gusto carries it further than it should go. It's entertaining and frequently involving. A real surprise.

#### THE EVIL DEAD II: DEAD BY DAWN: \*\*\*\*

The original Evil Dead, made on a shoe-string, filled in 16mm, and released directly to video tape, is one of the scariest films released during the eighties. Why then is DEAD BY DAWN never as involving as the original production even though the production values and effects are more fully realized and more professionally executed?

First off, The Evil Dead II is not a sequel as much as it is a remake of the original, almost as though director Sam Raimi had the budget and studio support to film the movie as he perhaps always envisioned it. Thus the ending of the original can now be changed to incorporate the heroine's ballet so that the marvelous stop-motion dance of death featuring the rotting, beheaded corpse of the heroine could be included. Dead by Dawn features entire sequences either directly refilmed or re-thought so that the final result might be slightly different. So what we ultimately get here is The Evil Dead II—the "special edition."

Unfortunately, just as Stuart Gordon found himself carried away with a hefty budget and the ability to create state-of-the-art monster effects, so too does Sam Raimi get carried away with monsters and slithery creepy-crawlers. Instead of offering brief glimpses of such creatures, Raimi allows long, protracted camera pans which focus on necks elongating and faces being transformed. For me the makeup and monsters are more professionally handled, but they are not nearly as effective as the bargain-basement makeups executed in the original.

One more problem exists in Dead by Dawn: the disconcerting tone of the film. A friend, Billy George, called the movie "The Three Stooges Go to Hell," and this describes one huge annoyance which existed for me concerning this film. The Evil Dead was so powerful because of its unrelenting radiation of horror. It had this one sole purpose: to terrify, which it did to perfection. Now, in the sequel, the audience is not terrified as much as it is dished out "splatter-schlock" humor. Our hero, Bruce Campbell, who deserves an award for receiving the most abuse in any horror film, finds his one hand possessed by demonic forces. The demon hand starts to break plates against his forehead in almost a caricature of Dr. Strangelove. This sequence culminates in Campbell literally flipping his body over in a

somersault—similar to what Curly Howard might have done in one of the Three Stooges two-reelers. Are we suppose to laugh at such antics or be terrified—or both? Whatever the intended effect is, the result was that I was sitting in a darkened movies theater quite aware that I was watching a movie. Never did I ever become so involved in the on-screen festivities that I became lost in the cinematic experience. Amazing, considering the fact that I originally watched The Evil Dead alone in my living room on the VCR and was scared to death.

Dead by Dawn is a hoot! It is riveting and unrelenting, almost to the point that the effect is lessened and finally lost because the pacing never builds, never changes momentum (it operates consistently at fever pitch). Even though it is more of the same, Sam Raimi, hopefully, has exorcised his Evil Dead demons and now will be free to move on to greener, more fertile pastures of terror.

#### A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET PART III: DREAM WARRIORS: \*\*\*\*\*

Wes Craven's original Nightmare was my pick as horror film of the year a few seasons back, but the first Craven-less sequel was totally disappointing for its overall blandness and lack of imagination. Even though Dream Warriors has not been directed by Craven (newcomer Chuck Russell does the honors), at least Craven was involved in the writing of the screenplay, and his creative imagination appears in evidence throughout.

Just as the original Nightmare dared to be different, now Dream Warriors manages to be daring and witty in its ability to horrify its audience. The ensemble cast of adolescent unknowns rise to the occasion and each creates a distinct, sympathetic character. Unfortunately, Heather Langenkamp so affecting in the original, almost sleep-walks through her performance here.

One of the "improved" horrific demon faces from EVIL DEAD II: DEAD BY DAWN. Once again humans are possessed by demon spirits.





The cleverly conceived and executed murders including a stop-motion Freddy puppet that comes to life controlling his human victim by tearing out the veins and arteries from his legs and arms to control him marionette-style is a show-stopper. Another female victim, who longs to be a Hollywood starlet, dies by being electrocuted after Freddy materializes out of the TV set she is watching and shoves her head inside.

The final confrontation between the kids and Freddy in the fiend's hellish lair is visually exciting and dramatically involving. As the adults are attempting to put Freddy's soul to rest at the auto burial grounds (Freddy's skeletal remains return to terrifying life via impressive stop-motion animation reminiscent of Harryhausen's work), the "dream warriors" are pulling out every trick to defeat the depraved child molester.

I too am dreadfully tired of sequels, but when they are as involving and creative as this entry, I can accept this commercial fact of life. Dream Warriors is excellent horror cinema: well scripted, visually impressive, well acted, and genuinely spooky. I was both surprised and impressed. So impressed, mind you, that I have to award the annual "Mid-Marvelous" title upon Dream Warriors.

#### THE STEPFATHER: \*\*\*

Actor Terry O'Quinn is not Anthony Perkins. No, one look at Norman Bates and one realizes that this pathetic, withdrawn human being is not entirely wrapped tight. Neither is he Jack Nicholson (from The Shining), for O'Quinn's psycho, until the very ending, does not go over the top. He does not rant or rave, and he avoids the overly relied upon smile to communicate his lack of sanity. Still, he's not Hugh Beaumont (Ward Cleaver), because Ward was always a natural, always laid back, and was always in control. No, Terry O'Quinn is always trying to hold his state of pleasantry under control. The difference between Beaumont and this psycho is the fact that O'Quinn acts deliberately to create his "perfect guy" persona.

The Stepfather is not a great film. By now, too many films have attempted to portray the seemingly normal guy who turns out to be psychotic. This film executes the task better than most, but I had a feeling that this film would attempt far more than it did. At the end of the film I asked myself great, but is this all there is?

The film's most exciting involving sequence occurred in the sequestered "for sale" house which real estate agent Jerry Blake (Terry O'Quinn) showed, unknowing, to his stepdaughter's psychiatrist, who at this point suspects that something is terribly wrong with father, not daughter. The doctor, subtly attacking the importance of the family to pro-family pervert O'Quinn, quietly slips up in the consistency of his made-up history which O'Quinn immediately follows up upon with repeated beatings to his body and head with a nearby piece of wood. The juxtaposition of good-guy agent into violently out of control psycho adds power to this sequence. While actor O'Quinn is marvelous as the psycho, the film's script is too ordinary containing too much of what the audience expects. Director Joe Rubin, who directed the delightfully unexpected Dreamscape a few year's ago, makes an equally impressive movie in The Stepfather. But I wish the plot were as creative as the premise and the performances.

#### THE GATE: \*\*\*

This must be the year of low-budget films carrying on the tradition of Ray Harryhausen's model, stop-motion animation. Evil Day II contained an effectively executed sequence with the headless corpse of the hero's lover dancing in the moonlight. Dream Warriors featured the living skeleton of Freddy Krueger fight for his life (both sequences were designed and executed by Doug Beswick), and now we have the emergence of the huge Demon Lord from hell to terrify the audience in The Gate.

From the standpoint of special effects, The Gate is incredible featuring miniature demon animation, a huge Demon Lord animation, and lots of makeup of decaying human flesh. In one sequence, the living corpse of a worker trapped in the walls of the house falls slowly forward but as he hits the floor, his entire body is transformed into an army of mini-demons. Fascinating.

The idea of casting pre-teens and teenage actors to carry the entire movie turns out to be a wise move, for the youthful cast does a more than adequate job. Also, their characters are written so that they are total human beings—each has a problem to overcome.



One of the more imaginative sequences from A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III: DREAM WARRIORS. Here, Freddy becomes a living TV set

The movie's weakness is chiefly in the area of plot. Far too often this movie resembles both Poltergeist and Gremlins (especially the sequence whereby the young boy runs up to his father to hug him and the father's face suddenly deteriorates with flesh and eye-balls oozing from the skull). Also, the script is too concerned with logically explaining why and how all this hokum occurs. They have to levitate the boy, kill off his dog, bury it in the hole in the backyard, read lyrics from a satanic devil-worshipping rock band, etc. All this seems ridiculous and pointless—and it wastes valuable scare time.

But even with such flaws, The Gate is better than average, and in today's market, it is rare to see a "PG" rated horror film, one that younger children can see without being warped for life.

#### ANGEL HEART: \*\*\*\*\*

It is indeed all too rare that a mainstream director such as Alan Parker takes on the horror genre, and often when this occurs, the result is either pretentious or dreadfully boring. Such is not the case with Angel Heart, an odd-ball favorite of mine for 1987.

Typically, voodoo is my least favorite type of genre vehicle, for I find most voodoo films to be dreadfully ponderous. Alan Parker changed that conception for me. His film is bathed in creative visuals with outstanding cinematography and set design utilized to create a stark mood. The wacky-weirdo performance of Mickey Rourke is just right, as is the larger-than-life bravura of Robert DeNiro as the Devil. The use of flash-forwards and flash-backs, often annoying and unnecessary, are used to sparkling essentiality here.

The lovemaking scene between Rourke and Cosby TV daughter Lisa Bonet is indeed torrid, but the atmosphere of having them make love as the dripping rain water from the ceiling becomes transformed into blood is the essence of this sequence, not the nudity. This movie is the perfect example where style becomes substance. Even when the



That "horny little devil" Daryl Van Horne (Jack Nicholson) poses with THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK: Cher, Sarandon, and Pfeiffer.

plot becomes predictable (or at least "guessable"), the over all feel of this movie augmented by its inspired visual look makes the film interesting. The viewer is aware of being manipulated by a master who is not satisfied with playing things safely.

It is indeed inspiring to me that two of this year's most eccentric screen oddities (Blue Velvet and now Angel Heart) are also the most successful.

#### THE BELIEVERS: \*\*

This is the other side of the coin of Angel Heart. John Schlesinger, a very distinguished veteran director, turns his talent to the horror genre, and the results are mediocre at best. I really wanted to leave the theater loving The Believers, but I was left with the feeling that I vaguely saw this film piece by piece over the course of the last thirty years. Chiefly, this movie evokes memories of Roman Polanski's Rosemary's Baby with children being the objects of horror. Just as in that earlier film the victims are surrounded with warm, friendly people who turn out to be agents of evil.

But how many times have we seen movies whereby the forces of voodoo invade the beaming metropolis of modern urban life as the protagonist is warned to accept the obvious supernatural horror but ignores these warnings with charges that they are ridiculous. The plot is plodding, unoriginal, and the suspense builds far too slowly.

The worst thing that can be said of The Believers is that it is respectable, does an admirable job, and does feature fine performances by such super-talents as Martin Sheen and others. But how often do directors and performers of such high caliber make genre movies? And shouldn't the result be spectacular, not merely adequate? Perhaps I am not being fair expecting so much from a big budgeted movie, but the final thought I can leave you with is to compare both voodoo

films: Angel Heart and The Believers. Angel Heart is original and creatively daring. The Believers, on the other hand, is content to rehash older ideas, plays things very safely, and fails to really grab its audience.

Which film experience would you wish to repeat?

#### THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK: \*\*\*

Even though The Witches of Eastwick is a terribly flawed film, I still must rate it highly for its instances of brilliance. First and foremost the performance of Jack Nicholson as the Demon Devil is even more dynamic and evil than his performance in The Shining where I felt he went way over the top!). His enraged, passionate speech in church whereby he questions his mistakes being called "evil" and God's mistakes being called "Nature" is so effective. Never has the Devil been portrayed in films as being so evil, yet so human.

The film's initial fantasy sequences involving the seduction and courting of the three witches of the title are both funny, involving and warm. Nicholson's "horny little devil" romances are marvelous. However, by the middle the film turns from light fantasy and suddenly grows serious and violent. An annoying Veronica Cartwright is brutally bludgeoned to death. The witches ignore Nicholson because of this sudden death and he gains revenge by savagely murdering them. By two-thirds through the film the audience is totally caught off guard: is this a light comedy or a heavy, philosophical study of good vs. evil? Perhaps former Road Warrior director George Miller does not know the answer.

Another problem is the witches' revenge upon the devil Nicholson. It appears as though sequences of exposition have been deleted from the final print. The witches know immediately how to use their newly learned talents of the supernatural, they know exactly where the supernatural books that explain the spells are, etc. Somehow, a few sequences of explanation must have gone to the cutting room floor but they are very much needed to remind us that character is more important than pacing and action.

Finally, the contributions of Rob Bottin's special effects (including a giant cartoonish model of a "fifty-foot" Nicholson and a weird plant that sports the full head of Nicholson) are glimpsed all too briefly and utilized superficially. But as usual for Bottin's work, they are incredible.

So, The Witches of Eastwick is a film with plenty of flaws, but there is so much about that is either clever, hilarious, or just plain intelligent (and when was the last summer film that you could label as being intelligent?) that I can, for the most part, ignore the flaws and be dazzled by the strengths of this wonderful film. Nicholson is superb.

#### PREDATOR: \*\*\*\*

This is the perfect formula "B" film, dressed up as an expensive top-of-the-line product. It features screen presence Arnold Schwarzenegger in his most effective role since Terminator. True, he does have more lines here, but it is his stoic face and pumped-up muscles that carry the performance. Surrounded by an ensemble crew of personable muscle-bound grunts, half of which have charm and personality (give special credit to pro wrestler, Jesse "The Body" Ventura), Predator becomes the ultimate no-nonsense action film of the season. And under the direction of relative unknown John McTier, the movie comes to visceral life making the sweltering jungle location for all the suspense possible.

Another plus is the creative manner in which the alien hunter is portrayed. For most of the movie the creature is seen as a shimmering humanoid distortion fading into the jungle location—a chameleon, in other words. When the predator finally becomes visible, he is seen wearing partial space suit and armored weaponry. It isn't until the final dual to the death, enacted almost as a modern tribute to Beowulf, that the creature is totally visible in all its technical splendor. Following the dictates of the "hero's code," the alien refuses to kill Schwarzenegger (who is unarmed) with his advanced technology. Therefore, the final battle is toe-to-toe, fist-to-fist, human strength against alien strength. Even after the alien is wounded and trapped, Schwarzenegger is unable to crush the creature's skull with a huge rock. The cinematography of this final duel, occurring in the darkness of early evening, is beautifully rendered.



The miniaturized, villainous Igwe pursues test pilot hero Dennis Quaid through every inch of the human body, from *INNERSPACE*.

*Predator* is not the most original film to hit the theaters this year, but it updates an age-old premise, throws in classic hero mythology, and keeps the action extreme. Certainly, *Predator* is one of the most entertaining films to hit the theaters in a long time.

#### SILENT NIGHT, EVIL NIGHT PART II: \*\*

I was one of the fortunate few who never bothered to see *Silent Night, Evil Night* a few seasons back. Remember all the controversy this minor, soon to be forgotten "B" film garnered when media hype condemned this Christmas film because the psycho-killer dressed up as Santa Claus. In other words, the publicity helped make this production a money-maker. Myself, I passed.

What a surprise, this "sequel," which runs roughly 90-minutes, contains a full 45 minutes of the original film seen via flashbacks as the brother of the psycho from the original film, who has himself gone off the deep end, talks to a psychologist. Literally, the best moments from the original film are reprised here. If I had seen the original only to pay to see the edited version of that same film again, I would be very upset.

But the second half of the film contains several sequences of fun swaze. In other words the film's writer/director does not seem to take too much of this seriously and there are sequences of inspired black humor. My favorite occurs in a movie theater setting as the psycho, trying to make time with a girl, is repeatedly hassled by a rowdy in the back row. In a truly sick and funny turn, the rowdy sets his just dessert as popcorn flies and spastic legs and feet kick high in the air.

Still, *Silent Night, Evil Night Part II* is better seen as a video rental where it can be viewed late Saturday night with a bunch of the guys who can yell and scream at the twisted goings-on. Viewers beware!

#### INNERSPACE: \*\*\*

As Joe Dante graduates to the majors turning out mainstream, hefty budgeted projects, I wish more and more that he would return to the type of movie-making he does best: brutally humorous and violent exploitation film-fare. *Gremlins* is his only successful mainstream film but there is enough of his delightful "wise-guy" humor and satire to remind the viewer that Dante is at heart a maverick filmmaker one who is not afraid to take creative risks.

*Explorers* is Dante's most dismal moment. It took Dante 90-plus minutes of pedestrian, play-it-safe cinema to arrive at his creative punch-line, the biting and clever encounter with the alien children (and the sudden appearance of "daddy"). But the film was so dull, so predictable, so "safe."

*Innerspace* is a step in the right direction; for it is a fully realized and fairly enjoyable comedy science fiction film. For the first time Dante appears to be saying that he has a gift for comedy, so he is purposely attempting to spoof *Fantastic Voyage*. In the past Dante would litter his very dramatic films with the "spices" of black humor or biting satire. Here he attempts a conventional light-fare movie comedy. The results are adequate at best--the movie is once again too pedestrian, too sanitary, too safe. Dante continues to refuse to make creative risks, and this is sad.



Dennis Hopper, portraying gas-sniffing Frank, becomes the tormentor of Isabella Rossellini from *BLUE VELVET*.

If edited to a tight hour and forty minutes, *Innerspace* would be a wonderful comedy, but Dante stretches the film to two hours. Thus, the first third of the film at times drags; the audience becomes restless. The casting of Dennis Quaid and Martin Short is indeed inspiring. Physical comedian Short is perfect to enact the broad slapstick of the "possessed" nerd character he portrays. And Quaid makes a dandy "play at my own rules" rebellious hero. In fact, Quaid becomes a metaphor for Joe Dante himself--the creative rebel who is bound by a system he himself does not fully understand. Just as Quaid is trapped within the miniature capsule within the body of Martin Short, director Joe Dante is himself a prisoner. However, hero Quaid rescued, gets the girl, and wins by playing the rules his own way. Hopefully, such will also be the fate for Dante.

Besides, if Dante continues to make fluff such as *Explorers* and *Innerspace*, it won't be long until he will be sent back to the farm league, tossed from the majors, and maybe then he will return to uninspired filmmaking which produced his classic genre film, *The Howling*.

#### BLUE VELVET: \*\*\*\*

David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* is fantasy of a different sort. His quietly ambitious movie portrays the under-belly of small town America, portraying the seamier side of life existing parallel to the pleasantness. The depiction of the community in *Blue Velvet* is ambivalent: seemingly it appears as just another slice of small-town America, but in reality it is just as alien as the pod-polluted community of Santa Mira from Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Peaceful and so normal on the surface, the community is a hot-bed of sleaziness, unreality, and monstrous horrors just a fine-line below the surface.

Today, in the era of sequels, in the age of cookie-cutter movies where the same themes are constantly repeated, it is refreshing to see a movie with the creativity of *Blue Velvet*. To me it does not even matter that when taken as a whole, the film droops under its own weight. Instead, the film works best when taken in segments, looked at piece-meal. Even when riddled with flaws in logic, tone, and plot, *Blue Velvet* shines because of the single-minded visions of its creative director, David Lynch.

Dennis Hopper's villain, the helium-sniffing crazoid, becomes the center-piece of the movie. Hopper's interpretation of human evil will take its place in the screen villains' hall of fame, for his performance as Frank is perhaps the best movie villain since Andy Robinson haunted Clint Eastwood in the very first "Dirty Harry" movie twenty years ago. By all counts, his depiction of villainy is larger than life, but magnificently so!

Even the interpretation of hero and heroine Lyle McLachlan and Laura Dern as ultimate innocence is twisted and unreal, yet sensitive and touching at the same time. In the same manner, the parallel relationship between McLachlan and Isabella Rossellini (the transformation of youthful innocence into kinky sexuality) remains gripping and curiously perverse. All these and other characters don't quite exist in the real universe, yet this is a fantasy world light-years



Even his shadow remains in character as he pursues two punks assaulting a female victim. The shadow belongs to ROBOCOP!

from Oz or Wonderland. The only difference is that this fantasy world closely imitates the world of reality and the viewer is disconcerted by the weird festivities that occur in David Lynch's mind.

All in all, *Blue Velvet* is not totally successful on any one level, but the viewer has to give David Lynch credit for making one of the most interesting and off-the-wall movies in a long time.

#### THE LOST BOYS: \* \* \* \*

I am ambiguous in my feelings about *The Lost Boys*, one of the more big-budgeted, ambitious horror movies to be produced by a major studio in some time. Certainly, in the wake of *Fright Night* and to a lesser degree *Vamp*, the vampire genre, almost buried amid the decade of the dead, here is revitalized (as well as being modernized). The premise of punk-rock vampires, both outcast and misunderstood, hits an 80's chord that goes beyond clever.

First, many facets about the movie work brilliantly. First of all, the stunning cinematography by Michael Chapman and art direction by Tom Duffield stand out. The prevailing mood of something a little unsettling and a strange teenage sub-group is quickly established. The visual style of *The Lost Boys* approximates the visual style of the best rock videos: mesmerizing and lush in layers of thick textures.

Secondly, the acting on behalf of the mostly youthful crew is outstanding with the audience being able to both relate and sympathize with the plight of the victims. Elder brother Jason Patric is involving as the new guy in town who tries too hard to fit in and is slowly seduced to evil. Younger brother Corey Haim is wonderfully funny as the ultimate hero. Barnard Hughes, as the eccentric grandfather, gets his share of the best lines, and Dianne Wiest, as the mother, is multi-dimensional and lovably dizzy. Yet the major acting laurels must go to Kiefer Sutherland as chief youthful vampire David, who is exhilarating in his portrayal of evil.

On the negative side, *The Lost Boys* becomes an example of style over substance for the moodiness, cinematography, art direction, and



A new generation of youthful, Peter Pan vampires (we never grow old; we never die!) even sport earrings—from *THE LOST BOYS*.

inspired acting cannot compensate for lack of a decent, imaginative, and involving script. And who ever heard of a vampire film rich in mythic folklore (garlic, holy water, wooden stakes) that fails to include even one crucifix in the entire film (two fingers crossed together don't count).

The premise of having the vampires sleep upside-down suspended from the top of a cave is inspired, as is the idea of having the vampires fly like Peter Pan. The vampire makeup is perfectly matched to the personality of the performers. Yet, without a decent story to hang all this around, the movie seems far too hollow at the core. A nice try, but *The Lost Boys* is a noble failure.

#### ROBOCOP: \* \* \* \*

Most summer seasons are lucky to feature one science fiction adventure thriller. This season's *Predator* filled the bill nicely: muscles, weaponry, explosions all directed in a tropical jungle against the onslaught of a marauding alien hunter. *Predator* was the summer of 87's perfect fluff escapist fare. Then suddenly *Robocop* bursts upon the scene quickly becoming the superior s.f. adventure thriller.

*Predator* was little more than "Rambo Meets Aliens" slightly redressed and altered. The production took the tried and true but revitalized almost cliché material by the sheer strength of its slam-bang pacing and terrific suspense. All in all, it offered little in the way of originality.

*Robocop* takes the even more clichéd premise of the 6 Million Dollar Man and totally regenerates the concept into something that is fabulously original and fresh. Director Paul Verhoeven realizes that an action thriller gets by on the strength of its excesses, not its subtlety. Yet Verhoeven offers the best of both worlds.

First, the excesses. *Robocop*'s original "cut" earned the film an "X" rating for its extreme violence. Even in the final released "R" rated version, super-cop Peter Weller has his hand and forearm blown off, a bullet planted in his head, and his torso is riddled with thousands of bullets ripping him to a pulp. Even though *Robocop* plays as a comic book thriller script wise, its visual look is exploitative cinema of the most violent bent.

But in spite of such violence, *Robocop*'s superlative use of subjective camera [We, the audience see what Weller sees as he lies dying on the operating table. His video screen reality goes blank when he dies, but it suddenly bursts to electronic life as his new android being comes to life.], satire [The screen is perpetually bombarded with the latest TV commercials and news forecasts], and biting humor [Peter Weller's final line of dialogue before he destroys the villain, Ronny Cox, becomes the most satisfying single line of dialogue in ages]. All the diverse elements in this movie are executed with creativity and care. Rob Bottin's robot suit is quite clever, Peter Weller's makeup and mime movements are transfixing. Rob Bottin's gore makeup effects hit the mark, and Phil Tippett's inspired (at times even humorous) stop-motion animation of the killer machine ED-209 is breathtaking.





Is this sequence patterned after the original FRANKENSTEIN or YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN? Only members of THE MONSTER SQUAD know.

Robocop breathes freshness into the "old hat" to make the sub-genre of the action/science fiction movie seem new again. Without doubt, Robocop is one of the real surprises of this past summer season.

#### CHOPPING MALL: \* \*

The low-budget exploitation film thrives today, and even when exploitation cinema is "jazzed" up to produce films such as the moderate budget Robocop and Predator, one must remember that young filmmakers break into the field by producing cliches such as Chopping Mall. In fact, to give Chopping Mall its due, there are sequences in Robocop that "ape" similar scenes here. The premises are in some ways similar. Here, a huge corporation creates protective, security-minded robots to protect the public from crime. Immediately, the robots malfunction while stationed at a mall and start to savagely "blow away" innocent shoppers. As soon as a young victim is left in a pile of human rubble, the robot in metallic voice chimes, "Have a nice day!"

Director Jim Wynorski [Wynorski was the former co-editor of our sister fanzine Photon, published by Mark Frank during the 1960s-1970s] offers the usual semi-professional cast, fast-pacing, the over-emphasis on extreme violence (including a fabulous exploding head), etc. Nothing great really ever happens. But for a cheap video tape rental, Chopping Mall is diverting and gets the audience on edge for most of this. Hopefully, Wynorski will continue to mature as an artist without losing his creative grit.

#### CREEPSHOW II: \*

I was never a fan of the original Creepshow which I found to be an anemic translation of graphic comic book horror to the screen. Creepshow II is more of the same, but even less so. Anthology movies are flawed in that there never is enough time to develop character or story (and the resulting suspense, mood, etc.). But when I read the old "E.C." comics, I was enthralled with their terrific art, that gripping sense of story, and their horrific mood. Romero's comic

strip duet fails to hit the mark. Perhaps the script is chiefly at fault.

For instance, the first tale, "Old Chief Wood'n Head," syrupy sincere to the almost camp degree, is ultimately laughable. The sappy sincerity etched into old veterans George Kennedy and Dorothy Lamour, heightened by melodramatic string music in the background, is revolting to the point of embarrassment. What little horror manifests itself later on is almost a by-product, almost an after-thought.

The second tale, "The Raft," is more a horror situation than a fully developed story. Imagine several young people on a raft floating on a river surrounded by a plastic-wrap version of Caltiki. A few nice monster shots result, but the story lacks credibility, suspense, character. In other words, the audience is not involved.

Only the final tale, "The Hitchhiker," offers any real chills and suspense. One story out of three is pathetic, and even that one good tale offers little originality or clever cinematic craft. Former Romero cinematographer Michael Gornick here becomes a first-time director, working with a George Romero screenplay based upon "original" Stephen King short stories. Gornick may indeed have some directorial talent as exhibited by the final segment, but the script functions like lead boots on a drowning swimmer.

Romero's continued attempt to pay tribute to comic book horror is admirable, but perhaps the medium is the message. Perhaps comic book art does not translate directly to the screen as Romero envisions. Good intentions perhaps, yet a failure just the same.

#### THE MONSTER SQUAD: \* \*

Director/writer Fred Dekker, so promising in Homecoming Night, has turned commercial minded with The Monster Squad, his second movie. With very limited budget, and even more limited ideas, Dekker has attempted to refilm Goonies with heavy doses of Spielberg movie-making thrown in for good measure. The "Little Rascals"-esque Monster Squad even attempts to mimic the children around the similar characters from Goonies: the fat boy who finally fights back, the small intellectual who becomes the leader, etc. The ensemble acting between the juvenile actors is clever at times, frequently filled with witty dialogue, but haven't we seen this all before?

As a tribute to the Universal horror classics of old, The Monster Squad fails. The difference between the atmospheric horror chillers of the 30s and 40s and today's visceral ultra-gore goes beyond MPAA rating. Those older classics were beautifully photographed amid startling set designs incorporating first-rate acting and character development. Here, Dekker seems to believe that any old veteran TV horror host can portray Dracula, for the actor hired to play the role is about as scary as Elvira. The man has little scare presence, period. The makeup for the Wolf Man is embarrassing, especially when considering the fact that these monster makeups were executed by Stan Winston, one of the top makeup artists working in Hollywood today. However, his Gillman, except for the face, is very well done. But the Mummy seems too withered and weak to be menacing.

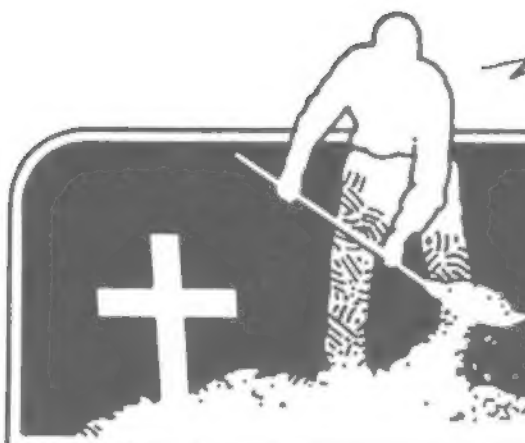
It is nice to see a horror tribute that is safe to take the younger children to today, but The Monster Squad is just too bland for its own good. Dekker is not an original mainstream director/writer. He is best advised to cease these pale Spielberg imitations and to return to the vitality of his inspired exploitation debut.

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# GRAVE DIGGINGS

Dear Gary Svehla:

Interesting to read your editorial condemning people who don't patronize new horror films.

Speaking for the "brain-dead, non-discriminatory snobs" who don't feel a desire to see splatter films of any description, I'm anxious to admit that I'm bored and disgusted by noxious movies like Day of the Dead, the new The Fly, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, etc....ad nauseum. There are too many hundreds, thousands, of older, more legitimate films, horror and non-horror, that I feel I need to see rather than waste my time or my mind on this sick, brutal junk. You usually cite "stomach-turning" special effects as a highlight of the four- and five-star films you review. I don't want my stomach turned by any film, under any circumstances, ever. And I don't enjoy being labeled brain-dead for making this obvious, common-sense choice. And I'll continue to denounce these splatter films, largely sight unseen, feeling no remorse when I happen to dismiss a well-made, blood-soaked, offensive film in the same breath that I dismiss a badly-made one. You're going to have to accept the fact that many fans have made the decision to simply avoid these contemptible pictures.

I don't mean to come down on you, Gary. Gore Creatures—cum—Midnight Marquee has been doing a good job of covering the vintage horror and sci-fi films for a long time now. But when you come on like some gore-happy teenager, announcing to your readers that you measure their intelligence by the number of Vomit Bag films they cherish, it's time for somebody to try to set you straight again.

Tom Weaver

North Tarrytown, New York

Gary:

My God, but I'm late in passing on my comments to you on what I consider the best issue of MidMar/GC I've read. Cover-wise, Allen K. and the red coloring went hand-in-hand to make the appearance eye-catching, to say the least. In fact, art-wise, this issue is one of the finest representations of excellence in b&w illustrations. Every contributor is to be commended.

10-4 good buddy on that editorial! Seriously Gary, you nailed it on the head with your comments re: the yuppification of today's horror and film fanzine. Jeez, the flack I've received for doing High Tech Terror is amazing. People who write (out of the blue) sound like snobs who only read The New Yorker castigating me for covering material they deem offensive. I sincerely hope you continue the broad overview of the genre we both so dearly love. All decades of horror and s.f. films have their fair share of drek. This decade is no different, but to dismiss films like The Fly and Dawn of the Dead, etc. because of the changing mores of society is a blinders type of approach. Whew, don't get me started.

Greg Mank's piece on "Universal's Facts and Figures" was fascinating. Gary, this type of article and research is what makes MidMar an excellent publication. It's precisely this that causes me to rave about your tremendously entertaining publication. Mank revealed information and facts I'd never even seen eluded to before. His work reminds me of a book that was published on Warner Bros. Studios a few years ago! Reading opinion is fun, but getting down to the nitty-gritty of budgets, schedules, and behind-the-scenes politics is even more captivating. The artwork and ad mats that accompanied the article were also very well done.

Arthur Lundquist's article on the "Jungle Woman" trilogy was about as uninspired as the series itself. Far too much dialogue was quoted (a little of this stuff goes a long way for me), and quite frankly, this Universal series deserves whatever obscurity it has faced. I'm not deriding Lundquist's writing ability—only his choice of subject matter. The article was well illustrated.

Paul Parla's piece on The Thing That Couldn't Die was just the opposite of Lundquist's. Perhaps it's due to the fact that (for me at least) very little has ever been written on this film. A small complaint is the detailed plot synopsis. The only other comment is that Parla finds things about this film to wax eloquent about that appear a bit over the top. A little bit of humor in the style of Bill Warren might have helped.

Jim Coughlin does his usual rewarding job on "Forgotten Faces." E.E. Clive I'm very familiar with, but Carewe was indeed a forgotten name (his part in Mystery of the Wax Museum I did remember). I would think that Coughlin could continue this series for some time to come.

The balance of the issue with Chamber's piece on Al Adamson, reviews and letters, etc. were all strong additions. Even John R. Duvoli was able to come up with a few different titles than is usual when discussing films that inspired Alien. However, I can't agree with his final comments on The Green Slime. Fun it ain't!

I certainly look forward to MidMar #36!

Adias,

Craig Ledbetter

Kingwood, Texas

Dear Mr. Svehla:

I especially liked Greg Mank's article on Universal's "Golden Age," the Paul Parla piece on The Thing That Couldn't Die, and your own dissection on the Romero zombie trilogy.

In your editorial you mentioned one reader being upset by coverage of ultra-gore cinema. I find, based on my one issue, that you tastefully blend both the old and new, with a greater push towards older genre films, which is kind of nice. There are plenty of other publications around whose main body of coverage is with current, lesser films (not to say that I don't enjoy some of these movies).

Concerning your movie reviews, I was happy to see that somebody else besides myself really enjoyed Highlander. Numerous other reviewers have dumped on it; I thought it was great fun.

Kindest regards,

Rob Richardson

Maple Ridge, B.C. Canada

Dear Gary:

I have received your latest issue of MidMar #35, and I must say I found it to be as good as always. What I liked most was the article on "Universal's Golden Age" by Greg Mank. Very well researched and informative! I also enjoyed the article on the "Jungle Woman" series and the piece on The Thing That Couldn't Die. I hope that in future issues you could print more of these kind of articles. "What Spawned Alien?" was also interesting. But that article on Al Adamson was a waste of space. I don't believe it deserves that amount of coverage.

Kindest regards,

A.A. Lerena

Argentina





